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SHORT STORIES

No. 762.] Week ending August 8th, 1903. [Price One Penny.

She pushed the pearls off one by one as she walked along.

(A Dramatic Incident from the Story, "The Man with the Strange Eyes." See inside.)

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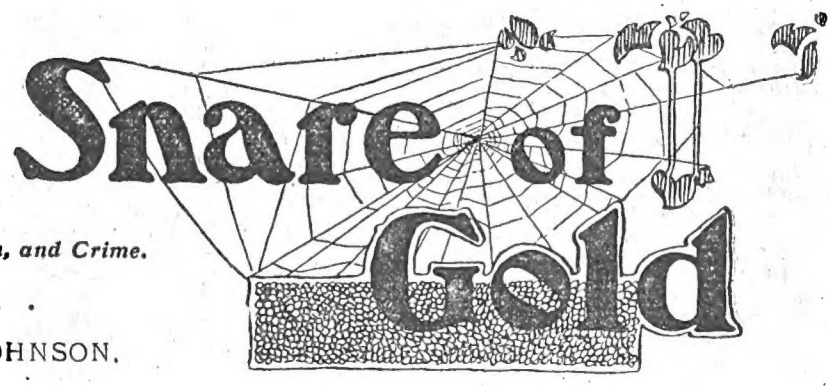
SHORT STORIES

No. 762.] Week Ending August 8th, 1903. [One Penny.

NEW SERIAL STORY. **STARTS TO-DAY.**

The Snare of Gold



A Tale of Love, Ambition, and Crime.

By

Henry T. Johnson.

FIRST CHAPTER.

The Chamber of Death.

Tick! Tick!

No other sound but that, the tick-tick of the death watch, broke, nay, intensified the silence of the death chamber. Presently the door opened, and with hushed tread four men, sombre of mien and garb, entered, furnished with implements of trade.

Methodically, impassively, they advanced to where It was lying in Its resting house upon the trestles. Casually they glanced at It, with no want of reverence, but with the stolidity born of long and constant usage.

And yet one of them remarked, involuntarily: "Looks like life, might be sleeping."

"Yes," said another, "wonder what it was?"

"Stiffkit says heart failure," said a third.

"Half a tick," remarked a fourth, who had moved to the door, responsive to a subdued tapping, "a genelman says if we'd like a little something before or after we've finished we'll find it in the room there on the right."

"He's very kind," said Number One, "let's get it over quick, mates."

"What's the 'urry?" asked Number Two, "the chap inside there ain't impatient."

"Not now," said Number Three; "it's hurry as brings on his complaint."

"Well, come along," said Number Four, "a little stimulant won't do any of us any harm."

And together they trooped through another door down the short winding stair to where, upon a table, stood a spirit tantalus, a tray of glasses and some sandwiches.

Once again only the tick-tick of the death watch sounded in the death chamber, except that from below there came at times a hum of subdued talk, a clatter and a chink, for the sandwiches were good, the spirits excellent.

George Geldart murmured: "So tired!" Then he dozed again. Presently he moved uneasily, stretched out his arms and yawned, dropped them; they hit on something hard, like the side of a chest or box.

"What a thundering long time I've been asleep," he said, with another yawn. "Hardly like a sleep, more like a torpor, anyway, must get up. Wonder what's the time? Blinds down, but it's daylight, and this is December, too. What are these boards? Why—what's it mean? These partitions—what's the matter?"

All of a sudden he gazed into a mirror on the opposite wall. Then a great gasp of horror convulsed his frame, and his cheeks blenched white as the weird, strange folds over his brow, his face and form. With a whimpering shudder he sank back again, then sprang up in the haste of terror. Not there—not there—he mustn't lie down there!

No, no; out and free he clambered. Then awhile stood still clasping his bandaged forehead with his hands. With dilated eyes again he glanced at the strange, weird sexagon still yawning there upon the trestles, then, with instinctive terror, he slid back the lid, closing the yawning interior, crept backwards away from it lest he might again fall into that rigid sleep—lest once again they might lay him there.

Voices! A man's and—a woman's. Still moved by instinct he flung aside the wardrobe door, drew himself within, closed it, stood there trembling like an aspen, cold as ice, and with the beads oozing from every pore as though the eyes were thawing.

"Would you like to look at him?" It was Eric asking.

And it was Clare who whispered: "No, no! I should read reproach in that face now."

"Why should he reproach?"

"Because, perhaps now things are clear to him; perhaps the dead know things the living keep from one another."

"What then?"

"Well, Ronnie was his favourite, till——"

"Till he robbed him."

"Till he *thought* he robbed him. But now perhaps he knows the truth, and that's why, Eric, I daren't look at him—daren't stay near him. Come, come away!"

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"Come along then. I, too, feel a trifle creepy here. There's one thing to be regretted."

"That he was cut off so soon?"

"No, no, not that."

"That we deceived him and wronged your brother?"

"No, no! I'm thinking what a pity, or, rather, what a shame it was that to the last he cherished that idiotic prejudice of his against Life Assurance."

"Eric, how hard you are! I wonder sometimes if you are conscious of any other emotion save the lust of gold."

"Oh, yes, yes! You don't know me yet. There is something else I yearn for."

The man there in his hiding-place could not see the sparkle in the girl's eyes as she raised them quickly to the speaker's face, but he noted the eager, yearning tone.

"Oh, yes, yes, I know. I think I know—anyway, I can guess, there is something else you crave."

"Yes," he answered. "Power!"

"Oh!" Her voice died in almost a wail, and Geldart heard her companion whisper in her ear, "Oh, yes, yes; there is one other thing I prize—your love."

"It is well you prize it," she said, "for it has made sacrifices enough for you."

"I know—I know."

There came a tap at the chamber door. Geldart could hear the frou-frou of the girl's skirt as she slid from the room and presently he heard another voice, the voice of Boanerges Blagdon, the friend he had so often befriended, and a suave, unctuous voice that Geldart knew to belong to a suave, unctuous, swat-bellied, double-chinned, blue-cheeked, bald man whispered: "We're quite safe now, Eric."

"Oh, yes," the other answered, "dead men tell no tales."

"It saves a lot of trouble, he'd have made an awful row when he learnt what we'd been doing with the firm's money, almost as much as when he found my promissory notes were missing."

"Yes, you can reckon that it was that excitement that brought on the fit that killed him."

"Don't say that."

"Why not? Because it's true; you know it is."

"Yes, yes," the other whispered in a lowered tone, "it was a frightful ordeal for me to go through—to tell him he was dreaming, that he never lent me the money, and that I never gave him any promissory notes. And, oh, his face when he went to his private safe to produce them, and pulling out the drawer within rummaged it over to find them, and failing to find them, shouted: 'They are stolen—stolen; my Ronald who has robbed me in other ways has robbed me of these, and I can see that you are in league with him.'

"Oh, I shall never get it out of my eyes, his face that had grown so pale turning from white to grey and from grey to purple, never shall drive from my ears the sound of his groan as he fell face forward full length on the floor."

"I wish you wouldn't keep on talking about that," said the other. "I wish, instead of talking, you'd pay up."

"Pay up what, Eric?"

"The price you promised me—the price I had to pay somebody else for getting your notes of hand."

"Why, why, Eric, we were both in the swim; the money was to make up your losses as well as mine."

"I don't care; you promised, remember, honour amongst ——"

"Don't—don't use such language, Eric. Don't say such uncomfortable things. You'll have to split on yourself as well as on me, and then you have no proofs." The voice was now more unctuous than ever, and then—Geldart could imagine, though he could not see, the stride the other made across the room, his fists clenched, his eyes dilated, and he could hear his words.

"So, you traitor, double-dyed, you'd betray even your fellow traitor; you'd play the same trick on me! No evidence now? That's where you're wrong. I've the evidence of one who at my bidding would tell the truth to her own eternal ruin. I'd tell the truth, too, if you came your tricks with me; I'd send you to Portland, if I had to go there with you, and toil there shackled limb to limb with you in chains."

"Oh, Eric, Eric, you mistake me!" the other answered in a trembling voice. "I know—I know; yes. You did the work—anyway, you got it done, and you shall have your price."

"You'll have a bad time if I don't," the other growled, and Geldart, listening, felt his heart turned to ice.

But he was to hear more yet.

"It's a dreadful business, Eric," said the other, drawing near the coffin, "on second thoughts I don't think I'd like to see him. I feel as if—as if—but then that's all imagination; he died a natural death."

"Yes," said the other, "and he died very conveniently."

"Well, it saved a lot of trouble. With all his eccentricities there'd have been some hard swearing to have got him safe away."

"Well, then, we should have sworn hard; Mac would have given the certificate. Anyway, he died and saved us the trouble—and the expense."

"Yes, yes, and it's better for him to be in there—and where he's going, than to be shut up in padded rooms and things, because he'd have been very violent, and he was always so very restless—superabundant energy they called it—but his abundance has all vanished now. Come along, Eric, I don't feel comfortable here."

The door clicked behind them. And, with icy beads trickling from his brow, silently, stealthily, George Geldart, emerging from that wardrobe, crept towards that other door ajar, listened to the clink and the clatter, heard a voice, "Now then, mates, back to business!" and another, "All right, only let's finish up, it ain't likely the cove in there will grumble at being left waiting!" Back from that door he crept, back to the wardrobe, wrapped bodily in grave clothes, mentally in thought. Softly he smote the left palm of his right fist, registering the stroke of an idea.

From within he drew a pair of Indian clubs, a set of golf clubs, a well-filled cricket-bag, a gun-case, and, swiftly crossing towards the trestles, pushed back the lid, then, with these things and the linen folds that swathed him, filled the emptiness that he had left. Then he withdrew within the wardrobe.

A moment later Number One, wiping his mouth with his sleeve, said: "Buck up, chaps! I fancy some of 'em have been in to see what's keeping us so long, I heard somebody movin'."

"Righto!" said Number Two, fixing and commencing to drive the screw, to make up for lost time. "Now we shan't be long!"

"Fancy a chap like him inside having to leave the good things of a house like this to go where he's a-going," said Number Three, in whom Hollands induced melancholy tendencies. And Number Four chimed in with—

"Just what I was thinkin', Alf, he won't do the feastin' where he's goin', though in one way he'll furnish the banquet."

And as they talked they went on screwing.

At last their footfalls receded down the stair—and then were gone.

Once again the man thrust back that wardrobe door, once again closed himself in darkness. For he heard another voice coming nearer—nearer.

"You might have waited just a little while—you might have let me look upon his face again. I've left the house, I'm leaving England, you've driven me not only from my home but from my native land, but you might have let me see him once. No, no! If you don't mind, I want to go in there alone."

And from within that wardrobe George Geldart heard the door close with a click, heard the sound of footsteps crossing the floor, then of knees sinking heavily upon it.

Heard yet another sound, a sad and cruel sound to hear; a strong man sobbing, clenched his own teeth and lips to keep down a something swelling in his own throat, listened with all his ears, with all his heart, and this is what he heard:

"Dad, dad! Oh, God, it was a bit too cruel! They might have let me see him once again—might have let me look on

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him, though never more he'll look on me. And now—Oh, father, father, you can't hear me—you wouldn't believe me when you could, but, oh, perhaps you might have done—in time! And now you'll never know. Oh, dad—dad! You're gone from me—gone believing wrong of me, who would sooner have died than wronged you. Oh, I loved you so!"

Then there was again a deathly silence for a while.

"Dad—perhaps it's best—for you'll meet mother, where you're gone—and she will know—and tell you!"

Click! Once again the door was closed.

Ronald was gone! Ronald, whom he had wronged—on whom the shadow of a wicked lie had lain, whose brother had been even crueller to him than was Abel's.

And then George Geldart left his hiding-place again, locked both doors, donned a suit of tweeds and a hat, an overcoat, a pair of boots, and, waiting and watching his opportunity crept down the silent stairs, across the lofty hall, silent as the grave to which he had so nearly gone. Softly closing the door behind him he went out of the house that he had lived in, out of the life that he had lived.

SECOND CHAPTER.

A Fortunate Encounter.

George Geldart traversed the thronged and busy streets like one in a dream.

An eerie, weird feeling possessed him; in this living world, bustling, and hustling, and thronging to and fro all round him he felt somewhat of an intruder. To that world he was now George Geldart, deceased; his life story a tale that was told, and the world had closed the book of it and placed it on the shelf of the books of the dead and done with.

Then he became conscious of a terrible hunger, not the keen, healthy hunger he had been used to feeling after a day with the hounds, or over the fields of his place at Penshurst, a healthy yearning that one enjoyed in the very anticipation of satisfying it, but a faint, sinking feeling. He was thirsty, too.

Hullo, a restaurant, the very thing! Striding in, he approached the counter, called for a glass of claret, and scanned a menu lying on the counter.

"Sixpence, please sir," said the brisk waitress, placing the glass of claret before him.

He smiled involuntarily at the idea of George Geldart, the connoisseur, calling for and awaiting with impatience a claret at sixpence a glass.

He dived his hands into his pockets. Empty! He tried the waistcoat, that cover, too, was drawn blank. The jacket—he hadn't a sixpence about him. On his declaring this the waitress promptly withdrew the glass of wine, while he could only fix on her a stare as blank as his pockets.

Only half conscious of the subdued titter running along the counter, he was about to transfer that stare to the menu when the proprietor, a fat man with black and oily curly hair, took it away, remarking contemptuously, "We have no trade on tick in dis here house, guv'nor," and in his anger and confusion, forgetting awhile hunger, thirst, and the physical weakness they were inducing, he strode out of the shop amid murmurs of "What cheek!" "Poor chap!" "Didn't work it this journey!" and so on.

He would find Ronald and would put things right. Aided by his second son, who would stand by him to the death, he would denounce the elder, who had lied and cheated so foully, "blighting his wholesome brother."

He sought the hotel where the lad, turned from his father's door, had put up. He had left that very day, taking all his traps, the waiter believed he was going abroad, but as to his destination they were ignorant.

Yes, yes, he remembered the boy's words, it was to be his last day in England. And the result of George Geldart's inquiry at the hotel shaped the strange course of his life from then.

Why didn't he go back to his own house, where abundance was his own? Because the purpose which was on him when he so strangely left it restrained him; the determination to test, even in the furnace of his own agony, the true and the false, the gold and the dross, this and a strong sense of fear lest those who had planned, having robbed him, to immure him all his days, should, now that Ronald was gone, none knew whither, succeed.

Ah, a street fountain! He dashed across the road, despite warning shouts, at the imminent risk of being knocked down by a railway van, filled and emptied the metal cup chained to the marble again and again.

Still he felt faint for want of food, the faintness was increasing and he wanted to hold out.

He began to wonder how long he had fasted, how long he had lain in the chamber where the death watch ticked. Then all at once his heart gave a leap. Here along the street came at a brisk walk old Donaldson, his friend and neighbour, he'd ask him for a sovereign for an hour or two.

Then he hesitated. Would it mar his plan? They were within a few yards of each other ere he had decided, and all at once Donaldson looked up full in Geldart's face. He turned from florid to mottled white and purple, clapped his hand to his left side with a gasping ejaculation, "God! how like!" then went hastily on.

Geldart walked on a bit farther, and then came to a standstill. A sight that one does not often care to see met his gaze, and caused him to turn his eyes in the direction from which it was approaching.

What was that? Why were cabs and 'buses slowing down? Why were people in the street ahead there staring into the road, some raising their hats? What was this advancing?

"By Jove, it's Geldart. Don't you remember me—Stanyer?"

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A cortège, headed by two men in black with white ties and flowing hat-bands, things they called "weepers."

Why, the men were mutes, yes, there behind them at a walk came a team of stately steeds, all raven black, with flowing manes, and big black plumes were nodding above their heads.

Geldart liked the old-fashioned plumes, had always said he'd like them for himself. How splendid they were, those coal-black 'steeds, with their black velvet trappings! And it was an open car they drew, his own idea again, and within it there was something that could not be seen for the mass of flowers, wreaths, hearts, harps, and anchors heaped over it, and each side of that car another man in black with a white tie was walking, carrying a wand.

Then came a carriage, and there, within the sombre framework of its windows, was seated his son Eric. How hard Eric's face was looking. Ronald would not have sat so hard of face and dry of eyes, but Ronald was not there—not there. Ronald was leaving England, the knowledge of this intensified George Geldart's sense of loneliness and fear.

Then came another carriage of mourners. His cousin Ferdinand, who had been such a distant cousin since he had made such strides in politics and public life, folding his arms and looking conscious as ever of his importance. And beside him his cousin Jack, whom he had been obliged to slightly cold shoulder, because Jack had really slipped so far down the ladder; even his black suit looked rusty and seedy—and—poor Jack, his eyes were quite red and his cheeks looked moist and shiny.

Opposite to him sat—well, what impudence! old Blagdon—his traitor partner, the thief and villain who to screen his theft, would have sworn away the liberty of the man whom he had wronged. Then other private carriages of friends—and enemies!

The doctor's brougham—there within it sat the scoundrel who, for a price, would have sent him, a trusting friend and patient, into durance. For a price—a price! Oh, the Snare of Gold! What meshes it made about the souls of men; and in the last carriage came the servants.

"Who was that old toff?" one bystander asked another, and, despite his vulgarity the inquiry gratified the subject of it. Not so the rejoinder.

"Oh! only old Geldart, something in the City, pot of money, but no class, pig-headed as they make 'em!"

It was gone, and presently came jingling along the street, a gaudy turn-out got up to advertise a new comic paper. Then a motor-car coughed and snorted past, and next there came a prancing pair of greys, driven by a coachman with a bouquet for a button-hole. And within the carriage sat a girl in a white veil beside a man with a red face and a mauve tie.

How strangely the web of life was woven!

It was a queer feeling that possessed him; it was like beginning life again, opening a new story, a sequel to one to which Finis had been written. Certainly with the exception of what he stood in, he was as penniless as when first he came into the world.

Then the thought flashed across him. If it were not so, if he had only the means to keep himself afloat, if he could only lay his hands upon one of the many thousands standin in his name in the books of various banks and corporations—why then, free and unfettered, he could devote his life to the great scheme that had evolved and shaped itself within his brain, the Secret he possessed, or rather that possessed him, the secret process of working the markets.

He had never developed it to anyone, had hinted at it, pledged his faith in it, just as he had when, upon his broaching the idea without revealing it, his son and Blagdon—that thief Blagdon—had laughed him into angry silence.

And he remembered with anger swelling in his heart, how they had looked at each other significantly. Why, yes, they would have made these very words of his, wise words though they were, links in the chain of cruel evidence that should deprive him of liberty, of management of his affairs, even of self-control, of all that makes life worth living.

Then he reflected. To-morrow, or perhaps to-day they'd read his will, the will which in a burst of anger he ten days ago had made, revoking his other will, leaving Ronald penniless, his bright, breezy Ronald; Ronald, who, thank God! he had learnt, and not too late, was no rogue and thief; Ronald, far more sinned against than sinning. Ah! when again they met it would be the father who would have to ask for pardon.

And then George Geldart reflected, he would have to set to work to get things right, to undo the tangle Fate had fashioned, and he had complicated.

"By Jove, it is!"

A hand descended on his shoulder. He turned and stood confronting a man wearing a long, flapping overcoat, a Colonial hat, and a pair of riding boots. A man, iron-grey bearded, predisposed to run to flesh, with the air of one who has won success and meant neither to forget it nor let the world do so. A man who seemed to expect you to stand still while he looked you up and down and right through, and delivered his verdict upon you; a matter of paramount importance to you.

"You don't know me, Geldart?"

"Not from Adam," answered the other.

"Of course not," the stranger went on, "I don't suppose a dozen people on this side even know that I'm alive."

It was almost on Geldart's lips to answer, "I can say the same," but he checked himself, and the other continued:

"I wonder if you remember Stanyer?" Then, after a pause, he added, "and the Mincing Lane days?"

"Stanyer? Stanyer?"

Geldart's Mincing Lane days went a long way back—back to the time when he left the Charterhouse—long before Charterhouse left "Smiffel"—and went to learn business routine in the counting-house of Berridge and Smilax.

All in a flash he located his man, though it was not easy to identify the big, sleek, assertive, elderly man before him with the lank, loutish, hungry-looking lad, the Stanyer of those days.

"Why, surely you're not Seedy Stanyer?"

The other man's lips and eyebrows for a moment angrily twitched, then he broke into a rather forced laugh.

"You've got it," he said, "you chaps nicknamed me 'Seedy' because—I was—well, I was seedy, I was very hard up in those days, and you were mostly young swells, sons of rich fathers, some of you paying premiums—I remember!" Then, just as Geldart with a nod was about to pass on, Stanyer exclaimed:

"Come and have a glass of wine."

Geldart, whose very soul seemed craving for the wine that had slipped almost from his lips, said eagerly: "Thanks." Then, after a moment's hesitation, "But, no thanks, I—I——"

"Come along," said the other, taking his arm. "I'd like to have a chat about old times." And Geldart, physically and morally too weak to resist, suffered himself to be led back into that very restaurant he had walked out of so crest-fallen.

"What's yours?" asked Stanyer. "Claret? Here, miss, glass of your best claret, and a whisky-and-soda. Fancy,

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Geldart, my meeting you this very day, I've just returned to England."

"Then you've been abroad?"

"For twenty years! By Jove, old man, I should think you wanted a glass of wine!" for Geldart had drained his glass and placed it on the counter with a contented sigh, and with action so emphatic, that with a click the fragile stem was broken.

"Confound it! I'm so sorry!" he exclaimed, hastily diving his hand into his pocket. "What's the damage?"

"One shilling, dat vos cut glass," said the fat man with the oily locks.

And Geldart hadn't a shilling on him. With a look of blank dismay he explained as much to his newly-found acquaintance, who, with a chuckle of supercilious good humour, threw a shilling on to the counter.

"That's all right, old chap! Here, have another, come along! It'll do you good. You won't? I know, you're afraid of it—between meals—and perhaps there's been a big stretch."

"Four days!" was upon his lips, then, reflecting that so much of the truth would not be credited unless more of it than he cared to tell were told, he said with a forced smile:

"Yes, a very long time."

"Sorry it's so bad as that," said Stanyer. "Here, let's squat at that table in the corner. Come along."

A novel sensation this, for George Geldart, of Mincing Lane and Bryanston Square, to be patronisingly given a dinner in a second-class restaurant—and to be glad of it. Somehow he found it amusing; anyway it relieved the intolerable strain of hunger and thirst which so nearly imperilled his plan.

It was by no means an elaborate repast, just a fried sole and a bit of chicken, but never in City hall or West End mansion had George Geldart ever eaten with such appetite. His companion watched him curiously.

"What changes are brought about by Time! And how differently things work out to what we anticipate. When I last met you I was—well, I was 'Seedy Stanyer,' with a vengeance, with nothing but my little screw to live on and never sure of that for much more than a week. And you? Why, you were a smart-looking swell and all the world seemed at your feet.

"I remember you and other chaps 'Tommy-dodding' for your screws at the end of the month—and now I'm worth——" He laid down his knife and fork and hooked his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat—"five and twenty thousand pounds!" and he uttered the last words in a tone intended to take Geldart's breath away.

"And you," he added with a sigh that was as satisfied as it was deprecatory. "Ah, well—I'm sorry—I really—am sorry!"—this in a tone of insistence, as though Geldart might be under the impression that he was extremely glad to find the acquaintance of his youth hungry and penniless.

Geldart's impulse was to blurt out, as under ordinary circumstances he would have done: "Confound you, sir, and your five and twenty thousand pounds—I'm worth five times five and twenty thousand pounds!" but the circumstances were very far from ordinary, and he held his tongue.

And Stanyer went on:

"But I've not done yet. For aught I know I'm only just beginning instead of stopping here to knock down the little pile I've raised. I'm going to pile it higher, higher."

"What brought you back then?"

"I came back to make a search, to try and find those who years ago I lost, lost of my own free will, thinking it better for their sakes, not for my own, mark you, for their sakes that they should lose one who seemed, as I did, under a spell that turned all my work, all my hopes, like Dead Sea fruit to ashes."

"Have you found them?"

"No, I've found no trace of them, and perhaps it's just as well, who knows what trouble I might bring by finding them? Anyway, I've given up the quest—let's talk of something else."

"And what may you be doing now?" Stanyer continued, not having heard of George Geldart, wealthy merchant, patron of the Arts and philanthropist, whose supposed death had caused such general and widespread regret. "I mean, what line of business are you in?"

"As a matter of fact," said Geldart hesitatingly, "just now I'm out of business altogether."

"That's very bad!" said the other man, "how long has that been?"

"Well, I haven't done any work to speak of for the last few years."

"Oh!"—severely. "But, though you don't look strong, you don't look exactly feeble, your looks have improved within the last five and twenty minutes"—and he glanced significantly at the empty plate and the wine decanter—"and you are by no means old, not so old as I am," as though that constituted juvenility. Then, in a severer tone. "I remember, even as a youngster, you weren't over partial to work."

"That's true!" said Geldart humbly.

"You weren't a plodder. Now I was a plodder. People used to call you brilliant, full of ideas and all that sort of thing, nobody ever thought me brilliant."

"That's also true," said Geldart.

"Well, I plodded and plodded, and now—see where the plodder is—and where you are!"

"True again," said Geldart in the tone of a remorseful Tom Idler interviewed by an Alderman Frank Goodchild.

"And I supposed you squandered a good deal of money?" Stanyer went on.

"Thousands," the other answered.

"Ah, well! You can't eat your cake and have it, and I suppose now you'd find it difficult to get a job, at your time of life, with so many young men crowding the market."

"I'm afraid so," said Geldart, "I suppose you couldn't put me in the way of one?"

"Well, I don't know," said Stanyer; "it just happens that possibly I might. I suppose there's nothing against you, except extravagance and indolence? You haven't disgraced yourself in any way?"

"Not that I'm aware of," answered Geldart.

"No, you never seemed likely to do that. Well, now, I'll just tell you how the matter stands. I'm not over here to stay, I came across for two reasons, the doctor suggested a voyage, and I had a quest to make, and thirdly I had an idea of establishing a kind of little agency over here in London.

"I export a lot of stuff to the United Kingdom, hides and wool mostly, and I want somebody over here to watch the markets and cable me regularly by code the fluctuations so that I can regulate my output; somebody who can make purchases or execute little commissions for me."

Geldart listening, pondered, moved almost to anger by the other's bumptiousness, almost to laughter by his assumption of Geldart's own decline and fall. Only, all at once an idea flitted across his brain, not quite across it, because it perched there and began to sing. The Scheme—the Scheme! The opportunity was come, yes! Stanyer might be made the means!

"Now," Stanyer went on, "here's a chance to climb back, to undo mistakes, to put your house in order. It's late in the day, it's a long way on in the race, but—you understand?"

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"Perfectly," said Geldart, "and I'm just the man you want!"

* * * * *

A few hours later Fenner, the butler at Geldart's house in Bryanston Square, went down into the servants' hall, took off his hat and overcoat and, seating himself in the chair before the fire, wiped the perspiration from his brow, and Batt, the odd man, remarked:

"Bless my soul, Mr. Fenner, how you are perspiring! Is it mild outside?"

"No, rather cold, Batt."

"Been walking fast, sir?"

"No," answered the portly old servant, somewhat absently. Then, after a pause, he said:

"Batt, do you believe in ghosts?"

"Lor', Mr. Fenner, why?"

"Because," the butler answered slowly and impressively, "I've seen one."

The other man looked at him curiously. No, the old man was sober and stolid as ever. Then, after a pause, he asked in a low voice:

"Mr. Fenner, whose ghost was it that you saw?"

And Mr. Fenner answered: "The ghost of him who was carried from this house to-day—the ghost of our dear master."

Then came the audible thrill of an electric bell and presently Mrs. Mason, the housekeeper, entered in a tremorous fluster.

"Mr. Fenner, we've got to go upstairs into the library, Mr. Eric says the lawyer's there and they're going to read the will."

THIRD CHAPTER.
The Reading of the Will.

And so the retainers of the household trooped up to the library, a sorrowful group. They guessed what was coming; more than once they had looked forward to that moment.

They were scarcely surprised at being summoned, George Geldart had been so kind and considerate a master in his lifetime that his servants were quite prepared to learn that they were not forgotten in his will, perhaps at times had wondered as to what extent they had been remembered.

Yet, now that the crucial moment had arrived, every one of them, man, woman, boy, girl, felt a pang; the donation, perhaps at last was coming, but the generous and courteous donor was gone. Respectfully they entered the library and grouped themselves in one corner in deference to a wave of Eric Geldart's hand.

Around the room were seated a number of friends and connections of the family. In the centre the solicitor was seated before a table with, at his right hand a shiny black japanned box inscribed in brand new gold letters:

The Executors and Trustees of the Will of
George Geldart, Esq., deceased.

Clare Armitage sat there, the pallor of her features intensified by her costume of unbroken black; mostly her eyes rested on the carpet, only every now and then they were raised in the direction of Eric Geldart, though whenever he chanced to meet her gaze they dropped again.

Ferdinand Geldart, M.P., sat there, his portentous air intensified, possibly in consequence of the fact that Jack Widdicombe, the failure of the family, was again at his elbow, full of his tiresome reminiscences of "Auld Lang Syne," "When we were Boys Together," and all that sentimental nonsense, so cherished by the people who don't succeed and so distasteful to those who do.

And there was Blagdon, churchwarden and pillar of his parish, type and model of solid, stolid respectability, with a character as spotless as his shiny, white shirtfront and his shiny black broadcloth coat—to all appearance.

And there was Richard Farningham, merchant, Director of the Bank of England, D.L. for the City of London, and several other things, the very type and personification of financial solidity, looking immensely bored and regretful that one more burden of trusteeship was cast upon him.

All glanced at the opening door, and Ronald Geldart entered. Crossing the room instinctively, he held out his hand towards the Member of Parliament, who, folding his own arms more tightly, turned his head away.

He was a tall, well-set lad, with dark, wavy hair and dark eyes, but lines about his face betokening a somewhat pensive cast of thought.

Unlike his brother in nature as in form and feature, studious, imaginative, it was a subject of comment in the circle of the family's acquaintance that the second son of old Geldart, commercial from his patent leather boots to the crown of his bull head, should possess a temperament so utterly opposed to his father's and brother's.

Dreamy, distrait, sensitive, Mincing Lane had for him no delights, the produce markets and the fluctuations no interest. his heart was set on things foreign to his environment; sculpture, painting, music, books, and all the time at his command in wandering through the galleries of Florence, Rome, Paris, and elsewhere, wanderings through mediæval cities, Nuremberg, Heidelberg, where he had studied, lazy jaunts and journeys to the beauty spots of Europe and beyond, while his father and brother were wrinkling their brows over the current prices of peppercorns, jute, and saffron.

He looked for a glance of recognition from Blagdon, who had professed such friendship for his father. Boanerges Blagdon dropped his eyelids and raised his fat, white, flabby hand in a gesture of deprecation. Ronald's face hardened, then softened again—he felt his hand clasped.

Cousin Jack, at all events, wasn't going to cut him. Then he crossed the room to where Clare Armitage was sitting—Clare, who once had seemed to him almost a sister, who perhaps was to be a sister yet, though Eric and she knew more than he could guess.

"Clare!" he said, almost appealingly, holding out his hand.

For a moment her eyes shifted unsteadily, then she dropped her folded hands into her lap.

"You won't shake hands, and let bygones be bygones, Clare? You won't have faith in me? You still believe all the evil, and won't credit me with any good?"

She answered coldly: "This is not the time or place to make a scene," and turned away.

"So you haven't gone yet?" Eric sneered, looking up.

"No," he answered. "I daresay you are disappointed, but I can hardly regulate my movements quite according to your wishes."

"And I suppose you want to know your share?" said Eric. "Well, you won't have long to wait."

Then Ronald, striding into the embrasure of a window, handsome and smart as ever, but the ordinary devil-may-care expression softened down in face and eyes, stared through the window blankly into space.

He leant there against the window-frame, gazing into the Square, but in reality seeing nothing.

This was the end of all his dreams, all his hopes, the hope that his father, when his anger at Ronald's refusal to go into the Mincing Lane business should have burnt itself out, would accede to his ambition and desire, and not merely allow, but enable him, to adopt a literary career, afford him means and facilities for travel in far lands, so that when the time came for him to speak his message to his fellow creatures he might have something to say worth listening to.

Eric might sneer as he liked, Ronald felt it was far better, far more worth doing, to give the world a new song to sing, a new story to remember, new creations to love and rejoice with, new themes for laughter, even for tender tears, than to have wrung from it toll of wares it was compelled to have, or by buying and sweating in the cheapest of markets and grabbing and grasping—yes, and lying in its dearest, snatch and grab, and hold out of the price one fellow creature paid for what another fellow creature had produced or fashioned, the largest share of all for oneself who had done nothing but step between.

The lawyer read the will. The testator, declaring himself of sound mind, appointed as his trustees and executors his friend Richard Farningham, his partner, Boanerges Blagdon, and his son Eric Cosmo Geldart.

Then came sundry legacies and bequests to relatives, friends,

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institutions, and servants, a handsome one of £5,000 to his one time ward and adopted daughter, Clare Armitage.

After that a number of annuities to late employers and servants, and finally the testator devised and bequeathed the whole of the residue of his estate, both real and personal, to his eldest son, Eric Cosmo Geldart aforesaid; absolutely, declaring that his son, Ronald Harvey Geldart, knew for what reason the testator had revoked a former testamentary instrument in his favour, and had excluded him from any benefit out of or share in his estate.

While this was being read the listeners fixed their eyes upon the brothers. Eric Geldart, for his part, seemed absorbed in contemplation of his finger nails. His brother Ronald was gazing steadily through the window, obviously undergoing a terrible struggle to master his emotion. The eyes of more than one of the old servants watched him through a mist of tears.

The lawyer's voice ceased, as, gathering up the papers, he took off his spectacles.

Ronald Geldart advanced from the window, rested his hands upon the table, and looking full into Eric's white, set face, he said:

"You've played your part well, Judas, and the stakes are yours; you've robbed me of my birthright, that I could forgive you. Thank God, there are things to me of far more value than gold and what it buys! But one thing, Judas, I never will forgive, you've robbed me of my father's blessing. Yes, you were worse to me than Jacob was to Esau, for our dead mother bade us, ever since I can remember, share and share alike, and, were she now on earth, she would cry 'Shame' on you!"

Then, without another word, he strode out of the room, out of the house that had been his birthplace and his home.

* * * * * * *

Relatives, lawyer, guests were gone. The servants had returned to the hall, Clare Armitage and Eric Geldart stood face to face.

"I am going now, Eric," she was saying, "going to my new home. Oh, how strange it will all seem leaving the dear old place!"

"Yes, yes," he said impatiently. "Good-bye, good-bye!"

"Oh, Eric, how cold and hard you are!"

"Now, now, my dear Clare, don't commence a scene, and you know how I loathe tears."

"I know—I know; sentimentalism isn't one of your failings, Eric, only everyone isn't gifted with your absence of it, with your convenient forgetfulness. I can't forget that twenty years ago your father and your mother brought me here, a fatherless, motherless, friendless mite, and oh, Eric, what I've done for you weighs like a load upon my heart! If they know—if they know, if together in the Beyond they are seeing all, knowing all, what will they say of what I've done?"

"Now, what on earth are you raving about? What have you done?"

"Oh, you know—you know! And you know that for no one in the world but you would I have done as much."

"Don't talk in riddles, Clare, tell me what you mean."

"I mean the crime—our crime, or, rather, crimes—the keys I took, or rather stole for you!"

"For me, Clare?"

"Yes, yes. Oh, Eric, I felt just now as though I must at all hazards, at all costs, confess the truth, here on my knees where he stood, before them all; it seemed so wicked to sit here quite silent, it seemed like doing that awful thing again."

"Clare, are you dreaming or raving?"

"Eric, what do you mean?"

"I simply mean that if you have done what you say you have done—well, silence is prudence!"

"If I did it? You *know* I did it. For you, or, rather, with you, for though it was my hand that carried out the theft of your dead father's keys, it was your brain that planned it, your voice that urged it, your influence that impelled it—as you know."

"I know nothing of the kind."

"Eric!" She almost shrieked his name, and with clenched hands and stern, set, defiant face, he answered:

"I know nothing, I admit nothing, I deny everything. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, Eric? Ah, yes, yes. I see it is wisest for us to pretend — even to each other. Yes, yes, and good-bye, Eric, or, rather, *au revoir!*"

"Clare," he said, almost appealingly, holding out his hand.

"I said good-bye!"

"Yes, until to-morrow."

"After what you have said, Miss Armitage, it must be good-bye for ever!"

He touched a bell. For a moment she stood there, spell-bound and speechless. The door opened.

"A hansom for Miss Armitage!"

The page hastened to the front door, and presently his whistle sounded.

Clare remained there, her hand upon the door, her feet upon the threshold. For some moments her breath came and went, almost in gasps, then in a low, hard voice, she said:

"So, then, I see the development of your plan. I hadn't seen quite far enough ahead before. I knew you were a villain, I never guessed you were a traitor."

He affected to ignore her and to be immersed in a book he

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snatched from the shelf beside him. Her hansom rattled up, she buttoned her glove.

"Having finished the evil work, you fling aside the tool you need no longer. Well—we shall see!"

She was gone. Gone without the scene and storm he had expected. And somehow Eric Geldart felt that had there been more storm, there would have been less peril.

FOURTH CHAPTER.
The Gulf that Separates.

But what was it that had happened to cleave this gulf between two brothers of the same blood? Why had Ronald Geldart hurled those stern and bitter words at Eric? Why, earlier in this story, did he fling himself there upon his knees beside his father's coffin in that tempestuous agony?

Let us carry back this story in retrospect to some weeks prior to the events related in the preceding chapters.

George Geldart paced his dining-room very much in the manner and mood of an enraged tiger. His son Eric, from the depths of his arm-chair, watched his father furtively, with observant eyes that shifted from the angry, irascible old man, striding to and fro, to the young one leaning by the mantelpiece gazing thoughtfully into the fire.

"I am sick of it, dead sick of it!" the old man cried. "All these years I've toiled and moiled for two fellows who don't appear to have formed the slightest conception of the meaning of the word gratitude."

"Father!" from both.

"Don't speak to me, sir," he said, turning in a fury on the younger man, and, confound you, sir! Don't knit your brows at me, and don't stand there mooning at the fire, or else, dash it all, I shall lose my temper!"

A smile played about the well-shaped mouth of the younger man. And the elder, noting this, red and rampant with passion, exclaimed:

"Don't try me too far, or else, Ronald, I shall say something I shall be sorry for! I shall order you out of the house. I say it's monstrous, it's shameful, the ingratitude I'm experiencing from my sons!"

"I must ask you to except me, father!" said Eric in a cold, decisive voice.

"Well," growled the old man, "certainly you are not such an idiot as your brother, thank Heaven, for one quixotic fool is enough in any family!"

"A fool I may be, father, though I wouldn't allow anybody but you to speak such words to me, but an ingrate I am not. I acknowledge all your kindness, and I thank you for it from the bottom of my heart, and if you'll give me time I'll prove my gratitude."

"Oh, certainly, certainly, you're proving it excellently already. Not content with your three years at Heidelberg, where I was fool enough to send you, instead of pitchforking you straight away into my counting-house when you left school, you've been mooning and loafing about the Continent and the East for two whole years, and when at last you do condescend to return home, and I ask you when you will be prepared to enter the City house, you talk a lot of drivel about adaptability, disinclination for commercial pursuits, and you lay down the hare-brained proposition that you shall devote your days to scribbling a lot of infernal nonsense to fill a publisher's waste paper basket."

"No, no!" protested Ronald. "Everything I have written, so far, since I began to write in earnest at all, has been printed, and, really, father, it's from a sense of duty, though you don't seem able to see it, that I have decided not to go to Mincing Lane. I shall be a hindrance rather than a help. I am sure that in another walk in life I shall walk alone, and I think reach my goal!"

"Oh, then, you've decided! Very well, sir, be good enough to go to your room!" The old man had turned from red to white with passion. "And meantime I will decide what to do with a son who defies me. To your room, sir!"

"Father, you are unfair!"

"Out of my sight, I tell you!" The old man flung wide the door.

Ronald Geldart, turning upon his heel on the threshold with flashing eyes, and exerting all his will to hold himself, and remember the respect due to his father, repeated, "You are unfair!" then closed the door behind him, leaving George Geldart alone with his eldest son.

The old man threw himself into a chair, breathing heavily, wiping the perspiration from his brow.

"Well, what do you think of that?" he asked.

"Idiotic," replied Eric, lighting a cigarette.

"I should think so," said his father, "even you are not such a fool as he."

"Thanks very much. I think if you've any further compliments to scatter, I will follow his example and leave the room."

"Well, you try my patience just as much as he. He won't come into the firm, and you, though you are in it, take sides with that insensate, muddle-headed Boanerges against me on every point."

"No, sir, on one point only."

"The most crucial of all, the point on which everything else turns. Eric, you must re-consider it. I tell you, my lad, there's a fortune in it."

While he was speaking the younger man's brows and his lips tightened.

"But, my dear father, it's against the terms of partnership agreement."

"Nonsense, our next profit and loss account must show a balance of twenty thousand pounds, out of that balance we can carry ten to reserve, the other ten, instead of dividing, let us apply to the furtherance of my system, the system I've thought out for years."

"And the system which is looked up in your own mind, which is a secret to Mr. Blagdon and to me."

"And which must be one till you assent. I'm not a stranger proposing a confidence trick, I'm the pillar of the whole concern, I've made the money, I tell you I can multiply our capital tenfold, twentyfold, a hundredfold."

"By embarking in another business, quite outside the scope of our partnership agreement."

The old man, at a loss for words, recommenced his sentry-go, then suddenly making a dash at the door, flung it open and was gone, banging it behind him.

"Old fool!" the young one muttered. "But, by George, if he only knew the truth! Ha, ha, ha! If he only knew that the twenty thousand that he wants to tap for his own pet wild cat scheme has gone in another little scheme!"

There was a tap at the door. A servant entered, ushering in a portly, pompous man of some five and fifty years. He was about to effusively greet the younger man, who, however, motioned him curtly to a chair, carefully closed the door, then asked in a quiet, dry tone.

"Well, what news?"

"Well, bad news, worse even than I dreaded, it's all gone, we're face to face with this, Eric, you and I have either got to make up ten thousand between us by next Wednesday, or else make a clean breast of it to your father, our mutual partner, and tell him that we've dabbled with our balance with the result that it is non-existent."

"Phew!" the younger whistled.

"How do you think he'll take it?"

"Kicking, biting, and fighting, he's just been on at me regarding the old fad, he wants ten thousand set aside to set afloat that madcap scheme of his; he's in a fury about another matter. Ronald has refused to come into the business, which is just as well, the fat would be in the fire if he went through the books."

"Well, I don't know how it's going to end, if he calls for that balance-sheet next Wednesday it's ruin to me, bankruptcy, disgrace. What's to be done?"

"Go upstairs and see him—say nothing!" and, with scared face left the room, leaving Eric pacing to and fro, thinking. If the doctors would! Such things had been known. If he thought his son had robbed him—and he had two sons!

(Further developments in the story next week.)

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The Man with the Strange Eyes.

Telling of a Hypnotist and Some Strings of Pearls.

CONTAINING THE INCIDENT DEPICTED ON THE COVER.

"Who is the girl over there?—the one in the white gown, with the strings of pearls round her neck?"

"My dear Staines, such ignorance would argue yourself unknown if you had not been trapesing about in foreign countries for so long. That 'girl in a white gown' is our newest heiress, Miss Muriel Reaside, and the pearls round her neck are part and portion of the most marvellous collection of jewels she has inherited from her father."

"Hum!" was the reply, whilst the man called Staines followed with his eyes the slim figure of the girl in question, who was at that moment standing beside the window talking animatedly to a tall, fair man of peculiarly pleasing appearance.

"Then she is an orphan?" It was the first speaker's voice again, and he turned upon his companion, John Lowe, a shrewd little man of middle age, a pair of piercingly bright dark eyes.

"Yes, an orphan, and, being just over age, an independent orphan," the shrewd little man laughed. "She would have been the prey of fortune-hunters, but fortunately she is already engaged to the man by her side, as good a fellow as ever breathed—Alan Macintyre."

Staines' eyes left Lowe's face, and once more flashed across the room in the direction of Muriel Reaside and her lover. A curious expression crept into them—an expression not good to see.

They narrowed slowly, and concentrated themselves upon the girl's face in a fixed, stony stare, whilst at the same time they retained their remarkable brilliancy.

A little smile just parted his thin, well-cut lips, but he uttered no word, and his companion was so intent upon gazing round the big drawing-room at the throng of well-dressed folk as to be unobservant of Staines' actions.

But at the other side of the room the girl upon whose face Staines' eyes were fixed suddenly shrank and shivered in the very middle of the sentence she was uttering, and with a half-frightened glance round her drew nearer to the open window, and put out her hand almost involuntarily towards her lover.

His startled face was instantly lowered towards hers.

"What is it, sweetheart?" he said anxiously, noting how the colour had faded from her cheeks. "Are you faint? Is it too hot here?"

"No—o," she whispered, looking round her again with a little shudder, "but—but, oh, Alan, I don't know what I felt all at once! Just as if some ugly, loathsome reptile had crawled over me, and were fascinating me as it might a bird."

She trembled again, and her lover drew her arm through his to lead her into the conservatory.

"What a fanciful little darling you are!" he said tenderly. "Lady Moore does not keep reptiles in her drawing-room—and in here, and——"

But before he could draw Muriel into the conservatory she had taken her hand quickly from his arm and was saying fast and nervously

"No, no, I don't want to leave the drawing-room, I would rather stay here—I *must* stay here!"

The colour was coming and going rapidly in her face, her eyes were unusually bright, and she turned her head from side to side with an uneasy, uncertain gesture, as though searching for someone.

At this precise moment two men approached the pair, the one a short man with a shrewd face, bald head, and pleasant smile, the other a tall, powerfully-built man, whose clean-shaven face and thin, well-cut lips evidenced considerable force of character, and whose dark and singularly piercing eyes shone with a strange brilliancy, and fastened themselves with a curious expression upon Muriel's troubled face.

"Miss Reaside," Lowe began in his hearty voice, "an old acquaintance of mine, just returned from prolonged travels in foreign parts, is anxious to be made known to you; may I introduce him?—Mr. Bertram Staines—Miss Muriel Reaside—Mr. Staines—Mr. Macintyre!"

The two men bowed stiffly to one another, Muriel also bowed, and then, with an odd, jerky motion, like some automaton, moved against its will, she held out a hand to the stranger, who took it and held it for the fraction of a second.

Another of those long shudders ran through the girl's slight frame. She lifted her eyes and looked up for a moment into the piercingly bright ones that watched her, then she said, slowly and automatically:

"I am very glad to meet you, Mr. Staines."

But the gladness was not reflected in her face, it did not regain its colour, and her eyes looked abnormally large and frightened, set in that white, still countenance, and although Staines talked to her for many minutes, she took no apparent interest in anything that he said. Indeed, there was an expression of intense relief upon her face when presently Alan touched her arm and gently asked her whether she would come and listen to the music in the next room.

She held out her hand to Staines.

"Good-bye," she said, the relief appearing now in the accents of her voice.

"I hope I may say '*au revoir*,' he answered courteously; "it has been a great pleasure to meet Lowe and other old friends here to-night, it is a great pleasure also to make new friends," and his charming bow included both Muriel and Alan in its graceful politeness.

"Who is that man Staines?" Alan Macintyre asked of John Lowe a few hours later, when, having taken Muriel home after Lady Moore's reception, he sat smoking in the club.

"Staines?" Lowe puffed a cloud of smoke towards the ceiling, and looked thoughtfully at Macintyre. "Well, he is a fellow I used to know fairly well, an interesting sort of chap, clever, brilliant, and all that sort of thing. Been abroad for years, not very flush of money, but none the worse for that."

"I don't cotton to him much," Macintyre answered shortly. "I don't know why, but I don't like the fellow's eyes."

"My dear chap, what rot! Forgive my bluntness, but really, poor Staines can't help having the eyes Providence has given him."

"Very likely not, but he can help the expression he puts into them, and I don't like it. I don't fancy the fellow, and I wish he had not been introduced to my *fiancée*."

Almost at the identical moment when this conversation was taking place Bertram Staines stood in the tiny sitting-room of a very third-class lodging house. The same smile with which he had looked across Lady Moore's drawing-room at Muriel again curved his lips, his eyes shone brightly.

"'As a bird into the snare of the fowler,'" he quoted softly. "She is likely to be easy prey, I fancy. I shall try to—to get what I want by fair means, and if fair means fail—well! then we must try—foul!"

* * * * *

"Muriel, I do not want to be a jealous beast, or to make

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exigeant demands upon you, but I do hate to see you becoming more and more friendly with that man Staines."

Muriel and Alan were walking slowly through the Park on a June evening three weeks or so after their first introduction to Bertram Staines. The girl no longer wore the old look of peace and happiness which had been her chief characteristic; she was worn, almost haggard, and her eyes had a strained, anxious expression.

She looked at her lover silently before answering his remark, then she said vehemently:

"I can't *bear* Mr. Staines, and you know it, Alan. Your jealousy is foolish, and most misplaced; I hate that man! I hate him! I hate him!"

"Then why is he so constantly by your side? Why do I find him at every party, at every entertainment to which you are invited? Why do I even hear your name coupled with his by some of the impertinent gossips who are always ready to take a woman's name in vain?" Alan asked irritably.

"I don't know! oh, I don't know!" Muriel cried, a sudden ring of passion in her voice, stopping dead in the deserted pathway in which they were walking. "I know I hate him; he is like a snake that repels and yet fascinates one."

"*Fascinates!*" Alan exclaimed scornfully, kicking a pebble from his path. "If that man fascinates you, I am sorry for you!"

"I can't explain," she said wearily, "and, oh! don't be vexed, Alan. I feel so utterly miserable, and I don't know what is the matter with me! Everything seems to have gone at sixes and sevens lately; ever since, ever since—I don't know when," and she drew her brows together in a puzzled frown, her eyes filling with tears.

"I can tell you when!" Alan replied savagely; "you have never been really the same since Lady Moore's party, when that beast Staines was first introduced to you."

A strong shudder shook Muriel from head to foot.

"I don't know what it was that night," she said faintly, "but I felt quite suddenly as though a reptile were crawling over me; it gave me the most awful feeling of fear and disgust; but I don't see what it had to do with Mr. Staines, much as I dislike him; and I hate his eyes!"

"Well, see that you have nothing to do with him or his eyes!" Alan said grimly. "Thank goodness you are going down to Beachmouth next week, and he is not likely to find you out there, or to know you are going."

"No, oh no!" the girl said breathlessly; "he will not know I am there, and I—I shall be safe with your sister, and in a big hotel. I think I am getting nervous and silly, Alan"—she looked fearfully round her—"and sea air will do me good. I feel frightened at everything nowadays, but at Beachmouth I shall be safe, and free from—Mr. Staines and his hateful eyes!"

Perhaps she would have felt less confident could she have seen a telegram that was dispatched the evening before from Bertram Staines' lodgings. It ran thus:

"Expect me on Wednesday," and it was addressed to:

"The Housekeeper,
The Den, Beachmouth."

* * * * *

Muriel Reaside, the lovely young heiress, was the admired of all beholders in the hotel at Beachmouth, where she was staying with Alan Macintyre's widowed sister.

The girl was brighter and happier than she had been for many weeks past; the colour was returning to her face, the light to her eyes. Some of the strained, haggard look was dying out of them, and on the night of the annual ball in the hotel she was among the brightest of the guests.

True, her complete happiness was marred by Alan's absence, but she was young enough to enjoy dancing for the sake of dancing, and as her lover was to join his sister and betrothed on the morrow, Muriel could afford to be happy.

Mrs. Carr (her future sister-in-law) watched her with loving eyes, rejoicing in the change a week had wrought in her, and admiring the fair beautiful face, the shapely young form, and the snowy neck, against which a treble row of costly pearls rested, when she suddenly saw a flash of some inexplicable feeling pass over Muriel's face.

The girl all at once left her partner's side, and made a quick step forward, her head a little bent, as though listening, her eyes grown fixed and anxious.

The colour died slowly from her face, and Mrs. Carr, fearing she was ill, went swiftly to her side.

"Are you faint, dear?" she asked. "Can I fetch——"

"No, thank you," Muriel interrupted her, speaking in a dreamy, sing-song voice quite unlike her own. "I am quite well, it is nothing; only I have forgotten something in my room. I will not be a moment."

Then, without another word, she turned from her puzzled partner, and from Mrs. Carr, and sped quickly from the room.

Mrs. Carr returned to her seat and her comfortable gossip with a friend, and no one saw Muriel flying upstairs with eager, hurrying steps to her own bedroom; no one was present to witness how she tore open her jewel-case to take out the articles of jewellery she had been wearing, and put them into a black bag she had snatched from the table; nobody saw her steal down the staircase again, bag in hand, and creep past the ballroom door, from which there floated the languid strains of a waltz.

On tiptoe, and with hurried, nervous steps the girl passed out into the hotel garden, but there was no trace of hesitation or delay in any of her actions; she moved straight forward as though she were perfectly well aware of what she wished to do, and with swift, unerring footsteps wound her way in and out of the garden path to the gate that led to the top of the cliff.

Opening this, she passed out upon the short grass, never pausing until she reached a broken-down shed in the shadow of which stood a man, in a slouch hat, and with a dark cloak thrown round him.

"I have come," she said, in that strange, sing-song voice; "I have brought all!"

The man stepped out of the shadow and looked down at her with keen, eager scrutiny; in the white light of the moon his eyes gleamed brightly, their steely glance as it met the girl's made her shiver.

He saw the shiver, and it seemed to enrage him. "Pshaw!" he muttered, "I said I would have you and your wealth—by fair means or foul—and if it has had to be foul, it is your own fault, and the fault of your fool of a lover. I could have won you but for him."

Muriel did not seem to grasp the meaning of the savagely-spoken words; her snowy neck and the pearls that incircled it shone white in the moonbeams as she stood there, her great eyes looking wistfully out towards the sea, that boomed softly on the rocks far below.

"You will come with me now," Staines (for it was he) said slowly, in a voice the mastery of which was well-nigh irresistible.

"Yes, I will come with you," she repeated mechanically.

"Give me your bag," he said next; and without a word of protest she handed him the bag.

"And I think there is no need for you to see the way we are going," he went on with a short laugh, and, whipping a silk handkerchief from his pocket as he spoke, "we may as well make assurance doubly sure."

So saying, he bound the handkerchief over Muriel's eyes, a process to which she submitted quietly enough, although at his touch she shuddered violently, and put her hand to her throat with a little gasping cry—grasping unconsciously at one of her gleaming rows of pearls.

The violence of her touch broke the string on which the pearls were strung, and two of the shining gems dropped to the ground unnoticed by either Staines or Muriel, whose fingers mechanically closed over the remainder of the row she held.

Staines had taken her other hand, and fixing his baleful eyes upon her, said in a deep, penetrating voice:

"Come!"

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Trembling violently, and white to the very lips, she nevertheless obeyed him as meekly as a child, whilst he guided her stumbling steps away from the hotel, and out into a lane that led from the cliffs and the sea to an inland valley.

The moon shone but faintly now, and dark clouds swept the horizon; a little wind sighed amongst the trees, and the girl shivered again as it swept across her bare neck and arms, and ruffled the soft masses of her hair.

The strange couple proceeded slowly, and in perfect silence, the man with his dark face and gleaming, evil eyes fixed upon Muriel's, the girl, in her low gown, with the shining pearls at her throat, and shining pearls in her hand, blindfolded.

By the time they had left the cliffs and the moaning sea some distance behind them, the moon was totally obscured, and Staines was obliged to grope his way in utter darkness along a lane thickly shaded by trees.

Presently a twinkling light appeared ahead, and in another moment a small house loomed in front of them—a house on the door of which Staines knocked softly.

A bolt inside was instantly thrust back, and still in silence Staines drew Muriel across the threshold, hushing, by a stern glance from his eyes, the exclamation on the lips of the evil-looking woman who admitted them, and leading the girl into a room on the right, he seated her gently upon a big armchair.

Then he laughed softly—a laugh not pleasant to hear.

"I think she and her fortune are likely to be mine now," he said, and laughed again, as with deft fingers he unfastened the handkerchief round her brow.

At that moment he perceived the broken string of pearls she held in her hand, and an oath broke from his lips as he snatched it from her and examined it.

"She must have been dropping these priceless pearls like so much dirt," he exclaimed impatiently, "and I never noticed it! Well, if they're gone, they're gone—thank Heaven, she has others left," and his greedy eyes glanced at the rows still round her neck and the bag in his hand, falling last upon the girl's white, unseeing face.

She sat just where he had placed her, still as a statue, looking straight before her with eyes that plainly saw nothing.

Staines touched her arm lightly, and looked deep into her eyes with his terrible concentrated gaze.

"Wake—now," he said, and in instant obedience to his voice an understanding expression dawned once more in her eyes; she turned her head slowly, the colour suddenly swept over her face and neck in a flood, and a cry broke from her lips.

She shrank back in the chair, snatching her arm from Staines' hand, and an infinite horror was in her eyes.

"You!" she gasped, "you? When did you come? Where am I? Where is Mrs. Carr? What is it? Oh, Alan—Alan—Alan."

The cry rang out through the quiet room, but the only answer to it was a mocking laugh from Staines.

"Alan is far enough away," he said. "Screaming won't help you. You are in a little house I found here when you told me you were going to be at Beachmouth. I thought I should like to be near you."

"*I told you?*" The words broke from her in gasps.

"Yes, you told me. When we met at Mrs. Grant's ball, I—well—I questioned you in my own way, and you answered me. This little house—The Den—is very quiet, very remote. I do not advise you to scream or make a fuss. You are entirely in my power." The evil light in his eyes and smile made Muriel shrink further from his reach, and cower back in the armchair, panting like some poor frightened animal, her fascinated, fearful eyes never leaving his face.

"But why—but why—have you done it?" she moaned. "Let me go! Ah, let me go!"

"No, no, my pretty," he said brutally, "here you are, here you will stay, till you are my wife. We will be married very soon—very soon now—in quite a few days."

The words seemed to revive the girl's paralysed energies, she leapt to her feet, her eyes flaming.

"I will not ever marry you," she cried. "I hate you—I *hate* you! Why have you done this?"

She looked wildly round her, and wrung her hands. Her voice broke suddenly, and then she sobbed:

"How did I come here?"

"You came because, from the first moment I saw you, I intended to make you my wife, and I intended to enjoy your fortune," he laughed softly and wickedly. "I got you here very easily. You are susceptible to another's will, as I found out the first night we met. I have willed you to talk to me, often and often, when you were most unwilling. I have willed you to tell me what you never meant to tell me. And to-night I stood outside your hotel, and willed you with all my might to come to me, and to bring your jewels with you. That's all, and I think possibly your Alan may not care to marry a woman who follows another man in this fashion."

The eyes that watched him grew fixed with horror; the girl's face became the colour of ashes, and with a choking cry she dropped unconscious at Staines' feet.

When she was once more aware of her surroundings she found herself lying on a couch in her own sitting-room in the hotel, and Alan sitting beside her, his eyes riveted on her face, with a look of intense love and anxiety.

She put out her hand feebly and smiled.

"How—did—you—find—me?" she whispered. "When—"

"This morning," was his reply. "My sister missed you last night, and, nearly frantic, wired for me as soon as possible. I was in despair; I thought—forgive me, sweet, but at first I thought you had gone of your own free will.

"Then, when we found you must have left in your evening dress, with no wraps, no luggage, I felt sure you had been taken away; and then, it seems little short of a miracle, I saw, on the grass outside, one of your pearls! I wandered on, and found another, and yet another, till gradually I traced you to a lonely house called "The Den," and there I found you, unconscious, and talking continually of your fear of Bertram Staines. He had gone out, leaving you in his housekeeper's care, confident that we should not trace you; and we might never have found you but for the pearls!"

"And he—he—will he make me follow him again?" Muriel said, with a shudder. "I felt as if I *must* go, it was an irresistible force. Will he——"

"Never again, sweetheart," was the answer, "he is safely in the clutches of the law, and long before he is free again you will be my wife, and, I trust, removed for ever from the baleful influence of the 'Man with the Strange Eyes.'"

L. G. Moberly.

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A Bad Beginning.

Telling of a Rough Road that Led to Happiness.

As the door shut behind the graceful figure of Marian Summers, the stern-visaged woman who had stood with her finger pointing to that door sank into a chair and kept her eyes fixed with a vacant stare on the carpet beneath her feet.

The fire of anger appeared to have been extinguished; the noise had acted on it as water does on flames. Another feeling arose within the not-easily penetrated heart of Miss Eliza Burton, and the vacant stare already mentioned was necessary to keep her eyes free from a suspicious moisture that wanted to surge into them.

"Have I done right?" she asked herself. And she answered vehemently: "Yes, yes, yes!" Yet something within her hoped that Marian would not take the injunction seriously. "She will have a good cry in her room and then she will yield and do as I wish!" continued the elderly spinster. "We shall see!"

She felt a little more cheerful after that reflection, but her cheerfulness was banished by hearing the sound of a cab stopping at the front door of the grand house in which she lived. Was Marian really taking her at her word?

She crept to the window and peered out into the street from behind the curtain. Two small trunks were being hoisted to the roof of the four-wheeler; Marian was saying "Good-bye" to the old housekeeper, who had known her since she was a child, fatherless and motherless, intrusted to the care of Aunt Eliza.

"So she thinks fit to leave me for *him!*" breathed Miss Burton, a hard expression creeping over her thin features. "Be it so! She must pay the penalty; and, if I am not mistaken, Roy Hamilton will also pay the penalty for marrying her and they will be glad to come back and ask for favours!"

Miss Burton was one of those persons who gain a reputation for benevolence by spending money in furtherance of parish work and relief societies and by personally participating in the work; yet, in private life, she could do hard things under the idea that it was "duty"—things which would have justified anyone in setting her down as a stony-hearted woman.

Miss Burton was not the only one of her kind in existence; such people are to be met with constantly. In the name of duty they perform many strange and paradoxical acts.

She conceived it to be her duty to prevent Marian Summers from marrying Roy Hamilton, and she was determined to do it at all costs.

Had she been asked for reasons, she would have said that Roy was not a desirable husband because she objected to her money ultimately going to the son of a man between whom and herself a feud had existed for the past twenty-five years!

As soon as Marian was fairly clear of the house, Miss Burton took another step in her plan of thwarting the marriage; taking up a pen, she scribbled a note to Dr. Hamilton:

My niece and your son wish to marry. I strongly object, and I have done what I can to stop it. I think you will object; then do your best to stop it!

She posted this abrupt epistle herself; she guessed the effect it would have upon the irascible man and she smiled grimly.

Marian Summers went straight to the humble dwelling of a woman who had been her nurse, and was welcomed with open arms. The woman's eyes were also wide open with astonishment; when she learnt what had happened she was wroth.

"Miss Burton ought to have a piece of somebody's mind!" she cried angrily. "She's an old——"

Marian placed her hand over Mrs. Porter's mouth in time to stifle the uncomplimentary epithet. When the hand was removed, Mrs. Porter vented her feelings by exclaiming: "So she is!" and leaving Marian to guess what was meant.

"If you can give me a room," said Marian, "I can earn enough to keep myself by painting lantern slides and plates and all that. I wasn't trained to do anything for a living, but I like painting and I used to do the slides for Aunt Eliza's parish work. And I have a little money!"

"The young gentleman won't let you do that for long, Miss Marian! He'll marry you!"

"Oh, not yet!"—Marian blushed divinely. "He must make headway in his profession first!"

But Mrs. Porter was right. As soon as Roy Hamilton knew what had taken place, he called at Mrs. Porter's and pressed his suit with such vehemence that Marian consented.

"I won't say one word against your wicked old aunt!" he said contradictorily in answer to Marian's exhortations. "Still, she is—— Oh, very well, my pet. I'll just forget her! But I feel so cross that——"

Once more Marian interrupted his outburst and he cooled down under the influence of a loving caress. He grew quite calm and happy as he wended his way homewards, unconscious of the bomb that was being prepared for him there.

"It has come to my knowledge that you are paying court to Miss Marian Summers," remarked his father abruptly. "That must cease!"

In the circumstances their peremptory tone was the worst which the doctor could have adopted. Coming on the top of the other injustice, it made Roy flare up like a flash-light.

"I shall not!" he declared decisively. "Who has been at work?"

"I am informed by Miss Burton, who stands in the position of guardian to Miss Summers," retorted his father unwarily. "She objects; so do I!"

"I object to both your objections!" said Roy calmly. He restrained his rising temper. "So does Marian! We shall be married as soon as the banns are published the third time!"

Neither of the two men could remember exactly what passed; Roy could not keep his wrath under control, despite his intention to remain calm; bitter words were exchanged, and they parted.

"Our married life will begin in storms, dear!" said Roy that evening, when he called to relate what had passed. "But we shall be all the happier! A bad beginning makes a good ending, although I am not sure that it is a bad beginning!"

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Marian tried to dissuade him and said they must part; the breach with his father meant blighting his chances of becoming a barrister, and he must set to work to earn a sustenance for himself and her in some other direction. Yet, when he asked her point blank if she wished them to part, the tears rose to her eyes and she had again to yield to his intreaties.

Thus, under these unfavourable auspices, they were married quietly and settled down to make each other happy in humble lodgings which they had poorly, but comfortably, furnished with the money they jointly possessed.

And they were happy. Roy had secured a berth in a solicitor's office at a salary which, if very modest, was sufficient for their immediate necessities, and (like everybody else) they hoped for more in course of time. They occasionally thought with regret of the estrangement from their nearest relations, but they by no means regretted the step they had taken.

For the first few months, however, both the young people hoped that the elders might relent and hold out some peace-offering. Miss Burton's name appeared with rather monotonous regularity in subscription lists and as one of the organisers of this or that entertainment, while Dr. Hamilton's doings remained a secret.

He had not made any special mark in the medical profession, although he had worked steadily and earnestly on certain lines. He had always been rather vexed that the register contained the name of another Dr. Hamilton who had attracted some attention; for strangers sometimes mistook Roy's father for the other man, and it is not pleasant, when you are accosted as a celebrity, to be compelled to own that you are not.!

Four years passed away. They were happy years, although not void of trouble; but hitherto the troubles had been such as to draw the young couple closer together and increase the sweetness of life. But the dark side was now becoming darker, and Marian was conscious of a grief that ate into her heart slowly but surely.

The expectations of "getting on" had not been fulfilled. Roy had been compelled to leave his original situation in consequence of changes in the firm. A relative had taken a position and there was no scope for Roy. He had obtained another post, but this was not quite so good, and the prospects of promotion were very hazy. Roy tried occasionally for a better berth, but he was unlucky. There seemed to be so many men on the same mission!

Marian saw that the hard work of the office, seated on a stool and with very little recreation, was telling on Roy's health; and she had a secret feeling that he grieved at having to wear threadbare clothes instead of being able to dress well. The third-rate tailoring, too, was a shock to his sensitive nature; he had been so particular about the fit of his garments.

Her own health remained good, but Roy was clearly in need of change and more nourishing food. Marian racked her brain for some way to procure the money to give Roy what he wanted, and the thought had crossed her mind of sinking her dignity and appealing to Aunt Eliza. She dismssed this idea, however; she knew that Roy would be mortally offended.

She had once hinted to Roy that it would be a good idea for her to do some slide painting, to give her occupation, but he had misinterpreted the suggestion.

"I am sorry, dearest," he said tenderly, "that I cannot give you all that I should like you to have, and if you feel that you must have more, then I will not object to your earning the extra money which I cannot!"

"Oh, no, Roy! It isn't that, dear, indeed it isn't!" she cried, her heart stabbed by these sorrowfully-spoken words, "I wouldn't paint them for anything! I don't want the money"—she was going to add "for myself," but she stopped. It would have hurt him just as much to have told him the truth!

But there came a time when she resolved to do it and say nothing about it. She could tell him that she could do with less for the housekeeping. And, later, if he learnt what she was doing, she would be able to show him her hoardings, the result of her work, and they would take a holiday, he would have better clothes, and they would be as happy as in the first year of married life.

"He will let me go on with the painting then!" she told herself. "And it may be the commencent of better times! He said that a bad beginning made a good ending; that hasn't come about yet, but it may!"

She went to a shop in the City noted for its slides; they were

"Marian, what is it, child? Are you *really* blind?"

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very busy in that line and glad of a fresh worker, so they gave her a chance. The artistic finish which she gave to the slides pleased the heads of the firm and they gave her regular employment at home.

The pay seemed rather poor, but many other women did the same thing for a living, and Marian did not complain. She hugged her secret and worked steadily; the knowledge that she was earning made her more joyous and Roy was pleased as well as surprised.

"I am glad to see you so merry, dear!" he told her one evening, on returning from the office. "I have been worrying about you! I fancied that you were fretting!"

"Then you mustn't harbour such foolish fancies any more!" she cried gaily. "If you come home with so sad a look as you have done lately, you will make me worry! I suppose it amounts to this; you have been thinking that I was dissatisfied, and I was feeling the same about you!"

Then they both laughed merrily and gave themselves up to the pleasure of the society of the other, and drove away the shadows for the time being.

"I am perplexed to understand how it is that you are managing with less money, Marian!" he said, a week or so later. "Now——"

"It isn't your business to trouble about the household management, you have to leave it to me. Experience does a great deal!" she replied with a laugh.

He was forced to be satisfied. Another week passed, and he made a remark which caused her to place her hand to her side, as if in pain. It confirmed a fear which had possessed her lately.

"Your eyes look weak, dear! You should bathe them with something. I'll look it up for you among my notes! My father told me the name of the lotion, but I can't remember it!"

She promised him that she would get some of the lotion and bathe her eyes night and morning; she kept her promise, for she knew that her sight was less keen, and she hoped that it might be a mere passing weakness, but her hopes were not realised.

"It is the sight; it is really failing!" she murmured in alarm. "I must go to the hospital; I cannot afford to pay an oculist!"

The sight, constitutionally weak, had been strained by the work of slide painting, and glaucoma, the dreaded forerunner of blindness, had attacked her eyes.

She went to the opthalmic hospital, and they told her that nothing much could be done; she must wait till they became very much worse, and then they would perform an operation. The result of that treatment was uncertain, but it was all that could be done. In the meantime she must keep her eyes closed as much as possible.

On hearing this terrible verdict she was constrained to tell Roy what she had done.

"Don't be angry with me, Roy, dear!" she pleaded, her poor eyes filled with tears. "It was my love for you that prompted me to do it!"

"I know it, Marian!" he replied gently as he stooped and kissed her lovingly. "We must hope for the best!"

How could he chide her? She had sacrificed herself for the love of him! He railed against the fate that made him so helpless to take her out of this poverty and raise her to the position to which she had been educated; he railed against his father and Miss Burton; but it was all useless, and, strong man as he was, he threw himself in a chair in the other room and wept with vexation.

As a rule, glaucoma takes time to develop, but Marian's case was an exception. The disease developed rapidly. There is no visible sign of the malady; the eyes look well to others, but the patient finds the sight becoming hazy, then a fog appears to be hanging before them, and all is grey. The sight is gone!

Marian's eyes were in the hazy stage, when white paper sometimes seems pinkish. The haze was increasing and reading was impossible for more than a few minutes, and even then only with great strain. In a week from the visit to the hospital she was unable to read, and could scarcely grope her way about. The disease was not ripe enough for the operation, they told her, and she had to go home and wait in mental anguish.

She was lying on the couch when a knock at the door aroused her from her unpleasant meditations.

"If you please, Mrs. Hamilton," said the kindly landlady, "there's a boy downstairs from the City, and he says that them slides is wanted, and the customer is in a fine way, and the firm wants an explanation of the shameful way you've served 'em!"

It was not clear from the landlady's outpouring whether it was the heads of the firm or the slides which had been treated shamefully. Marian started up in alarm.

"Oh, dear!" she groaned. "I had quite forgotten them! I remember that I had a special set to do, and this trouble drove it clean out of my mind! Whatever shall I do?"

The landlady suggested the simple device of returning the slides untouched, with a message to the effect that she had been ill; but Marian recollected that the slides were for a particular customer, who gave the firm a lot of work, and this might lead to the total loss of this customer. The firm had been kind to her, and she felt that some explanation was really due to them.

"I'll go to the firm and explain!" she declared. "I can get them to put me in a 'bus when I come out, and I can ride right to this corner. I'll go with the boy now!"

Mrs. Mansell protested vigorously, but Marian was firm. She went with the astonished lad, who looked at her blue glasses with curiosity, but piloted her gently down the street and into the omnibus.

"It's a lady as wants 'em, ma'am," said the boy in response to Marian's question. "She was in a hawful temper about it, and I wouldn't ha' been in the guv'ner's boots for a sovereign! She asked me how long I'd be coming to you, and said as she would be at the shop again by the time I got back!"

"Then perhaps I can mollify her and so help your master," remarked Marian. The boy did not comprehend the term "mollify," but he said nothing. "I must bear the blame," continued Marian, "as it is my fault—or my misfortune!"

Marian arrived at the shop before the return of the irate customer. The proprietor was aghast at the immensity of his trouble when he found that the slides were untouched.

"Let me stop and explain to her!" said Marian. "I can sit here, and you can tell me when she comes, as I can't see her!"

"I am extremely sorry for you!" murmured the proprietor. "I fancy you won't want me to tell you when she comes in; you'll soon know she's here!"

Marian heard the swing doors open shortly afterwards, and she waited for a torrent of abuse, addressed to the proprietor, but the new-comer said nothing, and Marian concluded that this was another customer. She heard some low talk, and then someone approached her, and the head of the firm said:

"Mrs. Hamilton, this is the lady for whom the slides were intended. I have told her that you would explain!"

"I am very sorry, madam!" began Marian, rather lamely. "I was unfortunately attacked by——" She could not go on; it was too painful to speak of her misfortune, and she broke down. She tried to get a glimpse of the woman before her, but in vain.

There was a dead silence. The customer coughed, as if to clear some obstruction from her throat.

"Marian!" said a voice, the sound of which set her brain in a whirl. "Marian, what is it, child? Are you *really* blind?" The last dread word was uttered in a horrified tone.

"Aunt Eliza!" gasped Marian, stretching her hands in front of her.

"Yes, child!" came the reply, and—oh, how strangely gentle it was! And the name "Marian" ended with a sound that was suspiciously like a sob.

"I'm going into your private room!" declared Miss Burton to the master, and she marched Marian to the back of the

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shop. "Now, sit down there, Marian, and tell me all—all!"

So Marian told her all, sobbing the while; and Miss Burton took her home in a cab and went off in that same cab for a clever man who had made that complaint a special study.

Miss Burton was gone some time. Marian lay still, hardly able to comprehend the swift course of events. What a strange meeting with Aunt Eliza, after more than four years! And how completely changed was that worthy relative's manner towards her! It was the power of misfortune which had worked this miracle, so misfortune is likely to bring some compensating advantages, and it is right that it should!

Roy would be home soon, and how surprised he would be! But Aunt Eliza returned first, accompanied by the medical gentleman.

"Now James!" she said authoritatively. "Here she is! What can you do for her?"

The stranger pulled down the blind, lighted the lamp, and did what he could to transform the apartment into a dark room, so that he could use the ophthalmoscope and examine Marian's eyes.

"H'm! Not so bad!" he said, and Marian fancied that he heaved a sigh of relief. "You want some special glasses, my dear, which I will have made for you, and in a month or so your sight will be good enough for you to get about and read a little. It will come back again in time. Don't upset yourself about what the other men told you, they are still in the dark about this disease, but I have gone farther than they, and I'll cure you without an operation! But, mind, no more slide painting! Eh, Eliza?"

Marian was too overjoyed to notice the familiar style of speech. She stammered out her thanks to both of them, but the medical gentleman cut her short, though not unkindly.

"Tut, tut! It's a pleasure to do something for a woman who will do so much for the man she loves. You are a model wife, my dear! Ah, if I had known!"

"If *we* had known, James!" interposed Aunt Eliza sharply. "I take my share of the blame, mind!"

"Yes, yes! But we'll soon make it all up!"

Marian was vaguely wondering what it all meant when a quick step was heard on the stairs. The stranger sprang up from his chair. Roy entered the room hurriedly.

"Marian, how are they to-day? I——"

He stopped in amazement, his arms dropped by his side, and his faltering lips framed the word, "Father!"

"Yes, Roy, your father—come to ask forgiveness for the wrong he did your wife four years ago, when he thought that she was not a worthy helpmeet for you! But I can at least do her some good, make some reparation! I have done something in those four years!"

"Are you the Dr. Hamilton who has made discoveries in eye diseases? I thought it was the other man!" gasped Roy.

Then father and son stepped towards each other and grasped hands.

Aunt Eliza placed her arm round Marian's waist.

"It was as much my fault as anyone's," she said weeping softly. "Oh, I am so sorry! James and I were cousins, and we might have been—— Ah, me! I was too hot-tempered and we fell out, and the feud lasted till this very day, when I went to him and asked his help for my niece and his daughter-in-law!"

"The good ending has come, Marian!" cried Roy.

F. Brewster.

"Do you see anything coming our way?" asked the morning star of a companion. "Not yet," was the reply, "but I see a servant below there who is about to light her kitchen fire with paraffin oil."

"I DON'T see why I can't keep my husband at home," said a distressed-looking little woman. "Why don't you try to make home attractive for him?" "I have. I have taken up the drawing-room carpet, sprinkled sawdust on the floor, and put a beer-keg in the room, but, somehow or other, it doesn't seem to make any difference."

CONVINCING SIGNS.

Telling of How a Girl Knew She was Going to Have a Proposal.

THEY happened to meet in a large draper's shop the other day, and they had a conversation which sent one of them away with floods of light illuminating her soul.

She was one of those girls who are adored by old ladies and constantly invited to tea by them to meet bachelor sons, and who count all the admirers they ever had on the fingers of one hand.

The other—well, she was different. She was one of those maddening creatures who are always mysteriously supplied with roses and bonbons, and escorted everywhere, in spite of the fact that all the other girls are agreed that "there is absolutely nothing in her."

The latter young woman was meditating over some silks when the other one greeted her.

"I suppose you are trying to decide between the old rose and the pale green?" she said.

"Well, no," replied the other girl frankly. "You see, I am getting my wedding things, and I think I'll have both." Then she looked down to blush and up to see the effect of her words.

"Is it possible? I——"

"Yes, dear, and you can't imagine how nervous I am."

"Well, do tell me how he——" began the other girl dreamily.

"Proposed? Oh, but he hasn't done it yet!"

"But I thought that you——"

"Were selecting a trousseau? So I am, goosie. You see, it is like this. He will call at eight this evening, and by nine we shall be formally engaged."

"But how do you know?" helplessly asked the other girl.

"When a man asks you in an anxious tone if you think a married man ought to give up his club, you may know that his intentions are serious, and when he follows it up a few days later by asking you if you don't think a man has a right to smoke all over his own house it is high time to decide when the wedding shall be."

"My goodness!"

"Yes, but that wasn't what convinced me."

"Oh, do tell me about it."

"No, it was simply this; I met him in the street yesterday, and he was reading a paper so intently that he didn't even see me until I spoke. Then he blushed violently, and in great confusion thrust his paper into his overcoat pocket. Well, he went home with me, and—now, you must never tell this as long as you live."

"I never, never will."

"Well, I was so curious to see what he had been reading that confused him, so that I made an excuse to slip out into the hall, where his coat was hanging, and take the paper out of his pocket, and what do you think it was?"

"Oh, I can't imagine."

"It was a ladies' paper, and the article that he had been reading was one which dealt with 'The Choice of a Home.' Now, do you see why I am selecting my trousseau?" she asked triumphantly.

"Yes, I do," meekly replied the other girl.

P. W. Lyon.

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Powerful New Series.

THE "BRIDGE" OF RUIN.

Being the

CONFESSIONS OF A GIRL GAMBLER.

EPISODE ONE.

The Trap is Baited.

"My Dear Olive,—*Will you join our house party this week-end? We have several other nice people coming down, and I am sure you will like them all. The lawn is in perfect condition, so bring your favourite racquet with you. If it should rain, we shall have to fall back on music, or ping-pong, and as Mr. Dean Fisher, the famous Bridge player, will be here, we can count upon being taught the most fascinating game of the age. In any case, we will take care that you enjoy yourself immensely. Do come, there's a dear, for old time's sake. There is a train from Euston at 4.35 on Friday afternoon, and Harry will meet you at this end. All love.—Your affectionate school-friend,* "Annabel Vernon."

"How lovely!" was my mental exclamation, after reading the above letter. "I'm longing for a glimpse of country life again, and nothing could please me better than to go down to Hertfordshire just now. I haven't played tennis for two years, but I shall soon get into practice again. But I wonder what made Annabel remember me just now, after losing touch with me for such a long time?"

It certainly was odd, but all the more pleasant on that account, that Annabel should renew our old friendship in this unconventional manner, and I determined to accept the invitation in as unquestioning a spirit as it had been given. To this end I immediately began my preparations, and for the next few days was happily occupied in buying various dainty but inexpensive additions to my wardrobe, for I naturally wanted to do justice to Annabel's good nature.

My choice was limited to half-mourning tints, for it was not more than six months since I had lost my only remaining near relative, the aunt with whom I had lived nearly three years, and I had no wish to show disrespect to the memory of so good a friend as she had been to me. Still, I had ample reason to be satisfied with what I thought it necessary to take down to Vernon Towers for a week-end visit, and I began my journey in the happy consciousness of being able to do credit to both my hostess and myself.

True to promise, Mr. Vernon met me at the station, and although I had never seen him before, he and I were soon chatting as merrily together as if we had known each other for ages.

As the trap turned smartly into the drive leading up to Vernon Towers, Annabel came flying to meet us, and she greeted me so rapturously that I felt less lonely than I had felt for many a long month.

"You darling!" she exclaimed, after kissing me affectionately on both cheeks. "It was so good of you to come!"

"No, the goodness was on your side. I've been very lonely, and been hardly anywhere since—since——"

"Yes, yes, I know. But we won't talk of your troubles now. You've come here to enjoy yourself. My word, how lovely you look! And what a smart frock you have on! You make me feel a regular dowdy little country mouse."

Rattling on thus inconsequently, Mrs. Vernon, herself a picture of dainty grace, led the way to a delightful room which awaited my occupation.

"There, now," she smiled. "Make yourself absolutely at home. If there is anything lacking for your comfort, don't hesitate to order it at once. You'll excuse me now, won't you, dear? I'm off to dress for dinner, and you have nice time to do the same. I'll send you a cup of tea, and will see you as soon as you come downstairs."

A second later, and my friend had hurried away to her own dressing-room, leaving me full of pleasurable anticipation concerning the enjoyment in store for me.

My dinner dress was very becoming to my fair hair and delicate complexion. It was also exceedingly smart, there being nothing about it to betray the fact that I had made it myself, and as I was known to have recently lost a relative, it would not occur to anybody that I would still have chosen black for economy's sake. To tell the truth, the whole extent of my fortune was but one hundred and fifty pounds a year, although by dint of careful management, I got as much effect out of it as some women would have got out of three times that amount.

It saves a tremendous lot when you can make and trim your own hats and dresses, as I was very fond of doing, and it was no part of my plan in life to tell everybody that my invariably stylish appearance owed nothing to either milliners or dressmakers.

"H'm! Peter Robinson, or Marshall and Snelgrove?" queried Annabel, looking very critically at me when we met in the drawing-room just after the first dinner bell had sent forth its warning peal.

"Neither," was my laughing response. "I prefer to be more exclusive."

"Lucky girl! I wish I could afford to stipulate for exclusive models. It takes me all my time to make my allowance spin out from one quarter to another."

I was about to rectify the wrong impression which my remark had apparently created, but lost my opportunity, for some of the other guests put in an appearance, and I was promptly introduced to them.

"Mrs. Grainger, here is the school-friend I told you about. Olive, this is Mrs. Grainger, a near neighbour of ours. Mr. Taskot, come over here, and let me introduce you to Miss Beresford. You ought to get on very well together, as you are both ardent tennis players. Mr. Fisher, I don't think I will give you the pleasure of an introduction."

"Oh, my dear Mrs. Vernon," protested Mr. Fisher, a spruce little man of about five-and-forty. "I shall be disconsolate if you leave me out of the running altogether. Pray, what have I done to earn banishment from Paradise?"

"You promised to give me a lesson in Bridge this afternoon, and you failed to keep your promise."

"That was my fault," interposed Mrs. Grainger. "We needed a fourth, and I wouldn't let him off till we finished. But we can do without him to-morrow, for Miss Beresford can take his place."

"She'll beat you all into fits. Nobody at school ever stood a chance against her."

It was Mrs. Vernon who volunteered this information, and I qualified it by saying, "I haven't touched a racquet for ages, so I shall be a perfect novice at the game. In fact, I don't think I shall venture to play yet awhile."

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"What a pity! I quite thought tennis would be your favourite amusement. Never mind, you'll enjoy Bridge all the more. Ah, there goes the second dinner bell."

EPISODE TWO.

I Enter the Trap.

THE dinner was a merry function, and I could not help admiring the ease and ability with which Annabel did the honours of the house. The menu had been carefully thought out, the dinner itself was beautifully cooked and immaculately served, and the table decorations evidenced much artistic taste.

Looking at Harry Vernon, I thought him a most lucky individual to have secured such a clever little wife, even as I thought her most fortunate in having such a handsome, good-natured husband, and such a beautiful home, apparently accompanied by any amount of money.

The only thing that jarred upon me at all was Annabel's addiction to slang, but, where everything else was so faultless, it would have been unkind to lay too much stress upon a habit that was probably due to mere exuberance of spirits.

Besides, it would have been ungrateful to see anything wrong in the old friend who had, after years of silence, no sooner remembered my existence than she had made plans for my happiness.

When one is determined to make the best of everything, it is easy to enjoy the gifts of the gods. But if a girl who has hitherto had hardly a glimpse of Society finds herself suddenly exalted to be the centre of an admiring group of devotees, and to whom libations of compliments, admiration, and deference are poured out unstintedly, it is not surprising that she is slightly carried away by excess of delight.

It was so with me.

I had occupied a subordinate position all my life, and although my aunt had been almost a mother to me, she had naturally been first in importance in all things at home, and no one had served her more willingly than myself. After her death, I had led a quiet life, principally because my lot was cast amongst people who had neither the money nor the opportunity to be very gay. Besides, the annuity which enabled us to live in much greater luxury than any of our neighbours was no longer in existence, and the little fortune that was bequeathed to me had been saved by my aunt out of her surplus income.

Thus it was that the new atmosphere in which I moved was doubly delightful to me, and as the bachelors of the party were as deferential as if I had been some great heiress, nothing was wanting to complete my enjoyment.

I shall never forget that first evening at Vernon Towers. Neither shall I forget the awakening which followed all too soon.

After coffee, Mr. Vernon suggested that somebody should sing, and Annabel immediately pressed me to do so.

"*I* sing!" was my amused exclamation. "Why, I couldn't to save my life! Don't you remember, Annabel, how you all used to laugh at me whenever I raised my voice?"

"H'm! Perhaps I do. But that is years ago, and I daresay you have taken lessons since then."

"Indeed I haven't! What use would it have been to waste time on a voice like mine?"

"Well, that's a pity, for nobody else seems given to music. I'm a real stupid at it myself. What shall we do to pass the evening away?"

"I'll give you the lesson in Bridge which some of you profess to want," replied Mr. Dean Fisher, and his offer was received with a chorus of acclamation by all save myself, who said ruefully: "I'm afraid it is no use counting me even as a pupil, for I have never handled cards in my life, and know nothing whatever about them."

"You poor dear!" exclaimed Annabel. "What a lot of pleasure you have missed! But you shall soon make up for lost time, and I'll give you no end of wrinkles."

"All the same, I think you had better leave me out, for I shall only spoil fun for other people."

"Very well, dear, please yourself. You shall be looker-on for one evening."

"Then you and I and one other will have to be 'lookers-on' also," remarked Harry Vernon.

"Yes, we must have Miss Beresford, if we are to make up two sets," agreed Mr. Fisher, "unless you care to play a three-cornered game."

"Of course. There are only seven of us without Olive. Come, dear, that settles it, doesn't it? You wouldn't like to spoil sport for the lot of us, would you?"

When Annabel put it like that, I felt that it would be extremely unkind to refuse, so, though I feared lest I should look ridiculous by reason of my ignorance, I consented to sit down and go through the rudiments of Bridge, prior to playing as a Mr. Bainbrig's partner. This gentleman did not arrive till dinner was over, and I gathered that he and his sister, who came with him, had recently taken a house within a mile of the Towers.

They were both well on to forty, Miss Bainbrig being rather younger than her brother. But they were both very handsome, and were still in the first pleasurable flush of succeeding to a big inheritance, which had been none the less welcome because it was unexpected. In fact, everybody here, except myself, seemed to be rich, and I could not help wishing that I was rich too, for I had not then quite realised how much a person has to be thankful for who can count upon a certain £150 per annum.

"I hear you haven't played cards before," observed Miss Bainbrig, "so I shall have somebody to keep me company, if I play as badly as usual."

"Don't you know anything about Bridge either?" I asked, and received for answer: "My dear young lady, I never had time to think of mere amusement until I was suddenly transformed from a poor governess into an heiress. That is where you have the advantage of me. You have always been well off, and heiress-ship sits easily upon you in consequence."

"You surely don't imagine——"

"Olive," interrupted Annabel, "you are wasting everybody's time. Do sit down."

Thus admonished, I took my seat at the table, and tried my hardest to understand all I was told, without appearing stupid.

"We'll just have a preliminary canter, by way of showing Miss Bainbrig and Miss Beresford how to handle the cards, and then we will have a rubber," quoth Mr. Fisher, sitting down as Miss Bainbrig's partner.

Very much interested, we spent a quarter of an hour in grasping the elementaries of card playing, and Mr. Dean Fisher was good enough to say that both Miss Bainbrig and I were likely to prove extraordinarily apt pupils.

"I think we may just as well shape our first game

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now," he said smilingly. "Practice is much the best way of teaching anything. What shall the points be?"

"The points?" I asked, feeling very dense, but at the same time being resolved to learn all there was to learn, so that when I began to try a real game, I might be more on a footing with those who could already boast a knowledge of Bridge.

"Well, you see, Miss Beresford," I was told, "one must play for at least a trifle, however small. Otherwise there is not sufficient stimulus to do your best. But the stakes shall be merely nominal. What do you say to a penny a point?"

Even I, with my small margin for extravagances, thought there could be little harm in this, and we all agreed without hesitation, although I did wonder just for a second what my dear aunt would have thought, if she could have seen me playing for money. "Still," I reflected, "to lose or win a penny on a game cannot amount to more than a few coppers either way during the course of an evening, and now that I intend to go out more than I have done before, it will be useful for me to have learnt the great Society accomplishment."

"I will deal, choose trumps, and play Dummy, and will explain my methods as I go on," said Mr. Fisher, who was evidently anxious to make his lessons thorough. "Then the ladies will know what to do when their turn for dealing comes."

Mr. Bainbrig had no objection, and we began.

"Hearts are trumps," said the dealer. "Play your lead, Miss Beresford. That's right. You should draw the ace with that card. Now then, Miss Bainbrig, turn your cards up."

All Miss Bainbrig's cards were now exposed on the table, and it seemed funny that she should not be allowed to play one of them herself, but await her partner's direction each time. I was relieved to see that 'Dummy,' as the exposed cards were called, only had two trumps, the knave and the ten, for I was already keenly excited at the idea of possibly proving as skilful or as lucky as my antagonists.

It transpired presently that Mr. Fisher held the three other face cards of the trump suit, thus giving him and his partner all the five honours. But Mr. Bainbrig and I won the odd trick, and scored eight below the Bridge, and in the next hand we were luckier still, for, diamonds being chosen as trumps by me, we won four tricks, and scored twenty-four below the Bridge.

"Thirty-two," counted Mr. Fisher. "That's one game to you."

I could hardly contain my delight at this announcement, and Mr. Bainbrig, who was almost as great a novice as we two lady pupils, beamed just as happily as I did.

Perhaps we should not have been quite so elated if we had fully grasped the fact that Mr. Fisher having scored twelve above the Bridge for having no trumps, and his partner forty-eight, because the four trumps she had were all honours, they were in infinitely better case than the players who had won the game.

The next game was won right off by our opponents, who scored forty above the Bridge for Grand Slam, and, as hearts were again trumps, they made fifty-six below the Bridge, our score being absolutely *nil*.

"That's one game each—very good indeed," smiled Mr. Fisher. "Now for the conquering game."

Perhaps Mr. Bainbrig made a clever calculation, and perhaps he imagined himself to be extra cautious. Anyhow, when he dealt, he declared *sans atout*, or "no trumps," and we won the game with one trick, scoring twelve plus a hundred for winning the rubber; while our opponents marked thirty for three aces in Mr. Fisher's hand.

"Splendid!" he exclaimed. "Miss Beresford, the rubber is yours, and I must actually acknowledge you my victor. Don't tell me that you knew nothing about cards."

EPISODE THREE.

A Morning Meeting.

We played two or three more rubbers, and as my partner and I always seemed to be getting the best of it, I was as eager to continue playing as anybody else. Rendered cautious, Miss Bainbrig almost invariably chose black trumps, which counted much less than red ones. But Mr. Fisher seemed to become suddenly imbued with a mania for "doubling," while the games followed quickly upon each other's heels.

"You are a rubber to the good," he said to me, after we had been playing some hours. "But I don't quite know how we stand. I'll reckon up the score above the Bridge afterwards. It's such a bother to stop and do it now."

"But we've won the most games, haven't we?" I asked eagerly, and was both proud and pleased when he answered ruefully: "Oh, yes, you have beaten us in that respect. Miss Bainbrig, I can't understand how it is we've been so unlucky."

"Neither can I," was the rather cross response. "I thought you were a most wonderful player."

"Well, of course," was the deprecating answer, "luck goes a long way, and perhaps it will change for us to-morrow. I'm sure our opponents will give us our revenge."

"Yes, to-morrow," I said. "To-morrow is Saturday. And on Monday I should like to have still another lesson."

"Very well then," agreed Mr. Bainbrig, "we will say to-morrow. There is nothing to prevent us from coming to-morrow evening, is there, Edith?"

"No, I think not," replied Miss Bainbrig. "We can come, and we shall get to know exactly how many pennies we have won or lost to-night."

"Yes, I'll have the scoring block added up by then. Mind you bring a few pennies with you, so that we may square accounts."

We all laughed merrily at this, and I added to the fun by pretending that I meant to buy something very extravagant with my pennies.

I had been too much engrossed in what was going on at our table to notice how the others were amusing themselves. But I gathered afterwards that Mr. and Mrs. Vernon had been opponents, and that they had been playing for shilling points. Mrs. Grainger and Mr. Taskot owned to being comparative novices at Bridge, and I thought it very nice of the Vernons to spend their time teaching a game of which they were so fond, when they might just as well have invited some clever people to amuse themselves with.

On the Saturday morning I rose more languidly than usual, for late hours were quite an innovation with me, and the excitement of the previous evening had helped to fatigue me. But I no sooner looked out of my window at the lovely scenery which surrounded Vernon Towers than my languor vanished like magic, and I hastened my toilet, so that I might enjoy a brisk walk in the fresh air before breakfast.

I made my way to a wooded eminence about half a mile from the Towers, and was revelling in the joy of gathering

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a huge handful of fragrant bluebells, when I heard advancing footsteps, and, looking up from my pleasant occupation, I saw Mr. Taskot approaching me.

"By Jove, this is lucky!" he exclaimed. "I never expected to find you out of doors at this time of day. How do you feel after last night's dissipation?"

"Dissipation?" I laughed. "It surely isn't dissipation to learn a game of cards?"

"No, of course not," was the prompt admission. "You ladies retired quite early."

"Much later than I usually do, though. I am generally in bed by ten or half-past."

"Then you must live in Sleepy Hollow when you are at home, and I pity you."

At this remark I felt myself colour hotly, for I fancied it was intended as a kind of hint that Mr. Taskot knew all about my modest circumstances, and my new surroundings had already imbued me with a desire to appear quite as smart as my fresh associates.

"It all depends upon what you call 'Sleepy Hollow,'" I retorted. "Personally, I don't think it matters which end of the day you choose for enjoyment, so long as you get it."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Beresford. I really meant to hint my envy of the idyllic life you lead."

"How do you know that my life is idyllic?"

"The fact is patent to the most simple observer. You are as fresh as a mountain daisy, and as sweet as one of those bluebells."

At this highly-exaggerated compliment I drew myself up to my most imposing height, and coldly bade Mr. Taskot "good morning." His familiarity jarred upon me, and I had an instinctive feeling that it had its origin in something that had conduced to lessen the respect which I considered to be my due, and which had hitherto always been conceded to me by any men with whom I was acquainted.

Apparently realising that I meant to maintain my dignity, Mr. Taskot hastened to apologise, and his profuse explanations succeeded in removing the unpleasant impression he had created.

"The fact is," he said, as we walked slowly back towards the house together—"the fact is, Miss Beresford, I'm the most awful ass imaginable. I always say the most tactless things one could think of, and I've the silliest way of forgetting that ladies don't like to be talked to as if they were dairy-maids."

"You find yourself so used to paying flattery to dairy-maids that you forget when you are talking to a lady? Is that what you mean to imply?"

"Miss Beresford, I had a suspicion yesterday that I was a very slow person, compared with you. I am sure of it to-day."

"I don't think I follow you."

"Oh, it's easy enough. You look as amiable as a Derby winner. But you can sting like a wasp when you like."

"Thank you. I'm afraid I do not appreciate the compliment."

"All the same, it is a compliment. if you will only accept it in the spirit in which it is offered. Let me try again to show you what I mean. I started by saying that I was slow, compared with you. You grant that much?"

"Certainly."

"Very well, then, I will prove it. When I came down here yesterday morning, I bragged of being a first-rate tennis player and a crack Bridge player, whereas I'm a very poor hand at both. You, on the other hand, played the dark horse, and vowed that you had never handled a card in your life. Result—you win a few rubbers, and I lose a pot of money after you imagine we have all shut up for the night."

"You lost a lot of money?"

"Heaps."

"But why risk it? Unless you don't mind losing?"

"If you come down to a country house where Bridge is the ruling deity, how are you to help yourself? Besides, a novice is always fool enough to think his luck will come uppermost directly, and I suppose I'm like all the rest in believing that when I tackle the cards this forenoon I shall leave Vernon hopelessly in the shade. Besides, I don't mind losing a pony or two."

By this time we had reached the house, and as it was close upon breakfast time, I hurried up to my own room, to freshen my toilet before going to the dining-room. I put my blue-bells in water, but felt somehow that I had been cheated of my full enjoyment in bringing them.

What was there in Mr. Taskot that jarred upon me every time he spoke? I gave him credit for not wanting to be anything but courteous and complimentary to me. And I certainly had no reason to suppose that the Vernons would invite an undesirable guest to their house. Nevertheless, his mode of expressing himself did not strike me as infallibly well-bred, and many of his phrases were, as he himself owned, quite out of place when speaking with a lady.

"I'll avoid another early morning encounter with Mr. Taskot," I told myself. "It will not do to create the impression that I am going out of my way to cultivate the society of the bachelor visitors at the Towers. Dear me, it's pouring with rain! What a blessing I got in before it came on."

At breakfast everybody lamented the sudden change in the weather, which would effectually prevent an adjournment to the tennis lawn, but there was no danger of our being troubled with *ennui*, for Annabel suggested that Mrs. Grainger, Mr. Vernon, Mr. Fisher, and I should play a rubber.

"No, I'll give place to Taskot," was Harry's magnanimous concession. "I have a few things to attend to, and if I don't turn up at lunch, I shall see you all then."

"Very well, then, I'll be Miss Beresford's partner," agreed Mr. Taskot. "But do you think the ladies will like to go shilling points?"

"No," drawled Mr. Fisher. "Miss Beresford played penny points last night, and I'm going to take my revenge on the same terms."

I was glad to hear this, for though I was eager to continue my lessons in Bridge, I would not risk losing more than a few coppers. At least, that was my idea, and so long as my partner and I won a fair proportion of games, I felt not the slightest premonition of coming mischief, although the persistent rain formed the excuse for spending nearly the whole day at the card-tables.

In the evening the Bainbrigs returned, and the programme of last night was practically repeated. I made rapid strides in knowledge, and the more insight I had in the game, the more fascinated did I become with it, and I felt positively sorry when the Bainbrigs rose to take their departure, after playing for a few hours against Mr. and Mrs. Vernon.

"Now, then, Mr. Fisher, how do we stand?" inquired Mr. Bainbrig. "We want to square up before we go home."

In the light of after knowledge, I feel convinced that Mr. Fisher, to whom Annabel

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handed her scoring block for final addition, wilfully delayed adding up the honours scores, knowing very well that none of the people to whom he professed to be giving a few good-natured lessons would have gone on playing if they had guessed how matters really stood at the beginning. Indeed, even Miss Bainbrig, who had spoken so complacently of the joys of heiress-ship, looked astounded when she received a little slip of paper, on which her indebtedness to her various opponents was marked.

But neither she nor her brother kept my attention long just then, for Annabel beckoned to me to join her at the other end of the room, and I hastened to hear what she had to say to me.

"How have you enjoyed your Bridge lessons?" she inquired, with a smile. "I hope you have found the time pass pleasantly, in spite of to-day's rain."

"It's been just lovely!" was my enthusiastic reply. "I never enjoyed anything so much in my life."

"I can quite believe that. For you must have been very much interested, or you couldn't have picked the game up as quickly as you have done. Mr. Fisher says that, for a novice, you are simply marvellous. You've played hours and hours, and only lost £11 7s. 10d."

"£11 7s. 10d.!" I almost screamed. "Annabel, you are making a frightful mistake! It isn't possible! I've only played for a penny a game!"

"Penny points, dear. That means a penny for every point, and sometimes you have been hundreds of points below your opponents in one rubber."

"But I've helped to win several rubbers, so I must have cleared on those games what I lost on the others."

"On the contrary, even where you won the rubber, your opponents had big scores above the Bridge, which left your score nowhere. But, as I said before, you have lost remarkably little for a novice, and £11 7s. 10d. means very little to you."

"Very little!" I groaned, sinking into the nearest chair, for my limbs were trembling under me, and I felt as if I should faint, so great was my surprise and horror at the information just given me. "Very little. Why, it means ruin!"

(In next week's instalment Mr. Taskot comes to my assistance.)

Gent: "What sort of a crop did you get from that field? Has it made good hay?" Farmer: "Hay? Why, bless yer, zur, Oi doan't trouble much 'bout it; a crop o' them 'vertisement boards pays Oi better!"

Miss de Fashion: "Mother, what shall we send Miss de Style for her wedding present?" Mrs. de Fashion: "Will the list be published in the paper?" "No; she says that's vulgar." "Send her a plated saltspoon."

Beggar (at a lonely crossing): "Please, sir, won't yer give me sixpence?" Gentleman: "Why should a big, strong, able-bodied man like you take to begging?" Beggar: "Because I'm big, an' strong, an' able-bodied enough to enforce my demands. See?"

"Yesterday," said Jabson, "I refused a poor woman a request for a small sum of money, and in consequence of my act I passed a sleepless night. The tones of her voice were ringing in my ears the whole time." "Your softness of heart does you credit," said Mabson; "who was the woman?" "My wife."

Your Editor Chats.

Before you read this you will probably have perused the first instalment of our new serial which starts on the front page. It is the story of what a man did for greed of gold and desire for power. Many thrilling incidents are related, and I am sure that the story will hold your interest from start to finish. I shall be glad to know what readers think of "The Snare of Gold."

Another feature of this issue is the first of a series of Confessions of a Girl Gambler, which are related under the title of "The 'Bridge' of Ruin." These confessions will give you an insight into what goes on at Society card parties and how friends dupe friends in order that they may extract large sums of money from them. Only recently some correspondence was published in the daily papers regarding the large amounts of money lost and won nightly at Bridge among the upper classes. Many of you may, perhaps, have thought it impossible for so much to have changed hands in a single night, but after reading these articles you will quite understand how it could happen.

The tenth list in the Juggled Letters Competition appears, as you will see, on the next page. In two weeks' time the last list will appear.

I am sorry not yet to be able to announce the result of the Buried Stations Competition. The checking of the attempts is being proceeded with as rapidly as possible, and as soon as it is completed the result will be published.

The most popular story in the issue of *Short Stories* dated July 18th was The Sisters; the others came in the following order:

A Woman Hater, Hilda's Hero, A Weir-Mitchell Victim, George Chester's Mistake, Playing with Fire, A Matter of Spelling, The Bottle of Cement.

The only competitor whose list gave the titles in their correct order was Mr. J. Roden, 239 Newcombe Road, Handsworth, Birmingham, and to him the gold-plated pencil-case has been awarded.

This is our Holiday Number, and I hope that everyone who reads it will think of the little slum children who are pining for a day in the country. Not only should they think of them, however, but send a contribution towards giving them a day of pleasure. Ninepence pays for a whole day's outing for one child, inclusive of a good supply of wholesome food.

This day means so much to these poor little mites, that if they do not get the opportunity of having it their disappointment is very great. Let everyone who reads this appeal send along ninepence—or more—and then the number of happy faces will be increased. All contributions should be addressed to the Hon. Sec., Fresh Air Fund, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., and they will be acknowledged in *Pearson's Weekly*.

Your Editor.

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COMPLETE IN TWELVE LISTS.

Letter Juggling Competition.

CASH DOWN. FIRST PRIZE, £25.	CASH DOWN. SECOND PRIZE, £10.	CASH DOWN. THIRD PRIZE, £5.

TWO BILLIARD TABLES *(measuring 4 ft. 10 inches by 2 ft. 8½ inches), together with cues, balls, marking board, and spirit level,*
And **TWENTY-FIVE GRAMOPHONES,** *each one fitted with a Concert Sound-Box, and accompanied by two records.*

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WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

Below you will find twelve sets of letters, each of which contains the name of a Railway Station in the United Kingdom (not necessarily using all the letters). You must write (in ink), in the space left for that purpose, the longest name you can make by rearranging the letters.

The name containing the greatest number of letters will be the correct solution. If, however, more than one such name can be made out of one set of letters, each will be counted correct. Only one name must be written on each line.

All the names will be found in the Index to Railway Stations in the January (1903) edition of Bradshaw's Guide. Should you be unable to obtain a copy of this Guide, a reprint of the Index will be sent to you for three penny stamps on application to BRADSHAW'S GUIDE, 59 Fleet Street, London, E.C.; or ROOM EIGHT, "SHORT STORIES," 17 and 18 Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

The first prize of £25 will be given to the competitor who fills in the greatest number of railway stations under the conditions stated. The second prize of £10 will go to the person who fills in the next greatest number, and the other prizes will be awarded in order of merit.

When you have filled in all the names you can find, take out this page and keep it by you. Don't on any account send it to us until the closing date is announced in "SHORT STORIES." Two more lists will appear.

In the event of a tie a further set (or, if necessary, several further sets) of letters will be submitted to the tieing competitors until one wins the first prize outright.

EXAMPLE:
ABGHIIMMNR... Birmingham.

TENTH LIST.

109. AEHILLMOWY .....
110. CEGHIINNRSV .....
111. ACDEELNOPS .....
112. ABEKLORTY .....
113. EEHMNORSTT .....
114. AAFHLMOSTW .....
115. BCEIIKMNOOR .....
116. AAEGHORRT .....
117. ACDEEFGNORSV .....
118. AACEFLORSTTYY .....
119. ACEFHNORRSW .....
120. ACEENNPZ .....

Name..... Address.....

.....

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Cupid at the Helm.

Telling of the Winning of a "New Woman."

"Are you determined to enter the race, Marion, in spite of the wishes of your friends?"

The season was drawing to a close at the popular seaside watering place, and the contest of the year for small sailing boats was to be sailed that day. The test was not only to decide the speed of the boats but to prove the skill of the sailors as well, and interest was greatly increased by the fact that one of the contestants was a woman.

A crowd of fashionable young men and women thronged the pier, chatting gaily among themselves and calling challenges and good wishes to the owners of the pretty craft.

Marion Dare had been the belle of the season. Her bright, happy nature and dauntless spirit had won the devotion of all who knew her; her slightest wish was anticipated by her many admirers, and she ruled her little court by the magic of her laughing eyes.

She had accepted the wager that "a woman's greatest possible skill could not stand the test of man's superior strength and muscle," and had avowed her determination to win the trophy from any man who wished to compete for it.

Startled by the familiar voice, she looked up quickly from the coil of rope she was untangling, surprised to find the speaker so near.

"I am quite resolved, Tom, so please say no more about it. I shall prove to you that the 'new woman' is not to be despised as a rival."

The man flushed at the thrust. He hated himself for his well-known opinion of the up-to-date girl.

A summer spent almost entirely in the society of a charming example of that type of young womanhood had altered his views very materially, and he had discovered many proofs of tender, womanly sweetness beneath the good-fellowship of this athletic girl's manner.

There was a note of tenderness in the earnest voice which a less determined listener would have found hard to resist.

"But, Marion, it is dangerous, foolhardy, for a woman to go out in a boat alone; you yourself can see a storm is threatening. Will nothing I can say induce you to remain on shore?"

She smiled brightly at his troubled face. "How dare you question my skill, sir? You who taught me all I know. I challenge you to combat. The race lies between our boats, and I warn you I shall lose no trick to win."

She waved her hand to him as the wind filled her sail and the little craft glided out into the bay.

With a gesture of impatience the skipper of the *Lurline* followed quickly in the wake of his pretty antagonist, and at a signal from the judges' boat the race started, amid loud cheers from friends on shore.

Marion showed her superior seamanship by crossing the line first by a clever manœuvre. Other boats followed in close pursuit, their sails outspread like the wings of white doves. There was a piping breeze from the north-west, and the boats flashed merrily through the waves, leaving billows of white foam behind them.

The young skipper of the *Lurline* soon outsailed the other craft, and came within speaking distance of the leading boat.

He called gaily across the water, "Shall it be gloves against a new pennant?"

The wind was steadily increasing, and now a squall struck the boats and laid them so low that their keels showed to windward. When they righted Marion screamed back, "Twelve buttons, if I win!"

The other boats were far behind and the race lay between these two. Marion stood bravely to her helm, never giving way an inch in her course, even though the squalls threatened to wreck her little craft. The *Lurline* was steadily gaining on her lead and the thought of defeat put her on her mettle.

About half the course was covered now, and a cheer went up from the shore as the *Lurline* came abreast the rival craft to windward. The boats tore madly through the water side by side; the excitement was at its height and each sailor watched eagerly for some point of advantage.

Suddenly a great puff of wind swept over the bay and struck the mainsail of the *Lurline* squarely, tearing it into ribbons. As the boom swept round it hit the skipper in the back and knocked him into the sea.

Obliged to exert every effort to keep her boat in its course, Marion was oblivious to all else until startled by the horrified cries of the watchers on land. Looking back to ascertain the cause she was shocked to discover the poor disabled *Lurline* drifting helplessly out to sea, without a skipper.

She brought her boat quickly about, gazing eagerly across the waves for some sign of the shipwrecked man. Finally, with a little moan of joy, she steered towards a black speck on the surface of the water.

It was the work of an instant to bring her boat alongside the drowning man, but the girl who held the tiller endured the agony of hours in that short race with death.

Wild shouts of joy greeted the pair as the young girl assisted her dripping companion over the side of the boat. Shaking the water from his eyes, the rescued man turned eagerly to his pretty opponent.

"I tell you, Marion, if you had been less prompt to act you would have had no rival sailor in these waters."

The woman asserted herself over the skipper, and now that the danger was past Marion burst into tears. Two dripping arms went round her, and she rested her head on a very broad but damp shoulder.

"Poor little girl, the strain has been too much!"

Marion cried softly to herself, and made no effort to leave the moist embrace. The guiding hand on the tiller almost relaxed its hold and the boat was kept to its own course, while Cupid took the helm. At last the sobbing ceased, and from somewhere in the vicinity of the lapel of his coat a saucy voice murmured:

"You were saved by a 'new woman,' Tom."

The arms tightened their embrace, as he pressed his cheek lovingly against the dark hair.

"Yes, God bless her! I adore the 'new woman.'"

She lifted her head—her glorious eyes shining with happiness.

"But I love you in the old-fashioned way, dear," she whispered.

Eric Canthorpe.

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Splendid Serial Story.

THE BOND BETWEEN.

A Romance of Real Life. By BLANCHE EARDLEY.

NAMES TO REMEMBER.

SIR TREVOR MAITLAND, of Maitland Manor, Melton.
LADY MAITLAND, Sir Trevor's second wife. Before her marriage with him she passed as a widow named Mrs. Vernon.
JACK MAITLAND, Sir Trevor's son by his first wife.
AGNES MAITLAND } Jack's sisters.
MURIEL MAITLAND }
WOOLF MAITLAND, the present Lady Maitland's only child.
IVY STRANGE, a foundling with whom Jack is in love.
HERIOT NORTH, a friend of Sir Trevor.
MIKE HOLLAND, an ex-convict and burglar who blackmails Lady Maitland, he having been in prison with her first husband.
DIGBY SCARLETT, an explorer and acquaintance of Jack. It was through him that Lady Maitland's first husband was imprisoned.
GILBERT CHASE, a detective employed by Jack to discover the mystery of Ivy's birth.
VERNON GRANT, Lady Maitland's first husband.
NURSE BEAUMONT, who knew Lady Maitland previous to her second marriage.

THIRTY-FOURTH CHAPTER.

"My Life Upon Her Faith."

"I'm more glad than I can say, sir, to see you something like your old self," Gilbert Chase said, as he stood in Jack Maitland's den the day following his departure from St. Pancras Station.

"And I to see you, Chase," replied Sir Trevor's son and heir, holding out his hand, which was still somewhat thin and delicate-looking, while his frank, handsome face had lost a little of its careless good-humour, and gained instead an expression of determination and sadness. He had been out of bed only a few days, and was still weak, though he was practically well enough to go about.

Gilbert Chase looked at him keenly as he seated himself in a chair facing his young host, to whom his usually blunted sympathies had been attracted.

"Yes," he said thoughtfully, "it's a long time, Mr. Maitland, since we parted, and much has happened in it, putting your accident on one side. By the way, I wish to ask you, sir," he went on, scanning the weary face of the boy who had employed him to solve the mystery of the missing girl's parentage some months ago, "whether on the night of the ball you did meet Mr. Digby Scarlett? You will remember, sir, you mentioned to me that you had an appointment with him?"

Jack flushed; the reason that occasioned the appointment recurring in a bitter flash of mockery, as he thought how the girl for whom he had desired to fight, had capitulated irrevocably, and was now out of his reach for ever!

"I remember the appointment I made with Mr. Scarlett very well," he said, after a pause, speaking calmly, "but did not meet him, and was about to retrace my steps, when I suddenly seemed to come to an end of everything."

"Humph!" murmured the detective in a disappointed tone. "Have you any idea as to the extent of your stroll before you turned back?"

Jack frowned. "Oh, no great distance," he answered carelessly; "this side of the spinny."

Gilbert Chase started. This side of the spinny! Then how was it that the stump of the Havana he had since treasured so carefully had lain on the far side of the spinny?

According to Digby Scarlett he had missed his adversary and returned to the Manor. "How then," the detective wondered, with a quickening of his breath, "had he managed to fling his half-finished cigar so close to the old oak in the place he professed ignorance of?"

He looked at the boy, who seemed to have grown so strangely and suddenly into a pre-occupied man, and wondered whether he had learnt of the weaving of Fate round the lovely foundling for whose sake he had so narrowly escaped death.

"Are you inclined to let me tell you some news, sir?" he began gravely, leaning forward, "some news that may distress you, yet which I feel it my duty to tell you?"

The thoughts of the boy flew to his sweetheart—she who was now the wife of another! Even the detective wished to sympathise with the man she had jilted, he thought bitterly, his young pride hurt that others should see his desolation.

"I know it," he answered curtly, "my step-mother acquainted me with the fact some days ago. If you don't mind, we will drop the subject, Chase."

Gilbert Chase swallowed a surprised gurgle.

He had been prepared for horror, dismay, even passionate protestations of denial, but this cool acknowledgment and desire to turn to other topics was an unexpected reception of his news. Had he, after all, he asked himself, made a mistake in thinking that the love of the boy was stronger than it really had been?

Surely, if his love were worth a straw, he would have shown more feeling than that on hearing of his sweetheart being wanted by the police!

Gilbert Chase felt that he had been wrong in his estimate of the strength of affection of which Jack Maitland was capable. After all, youth had not the tenacity of purpose in affairs of the heart that more mature age possessed. Yet, somehow, he felt sorry that the love idyll could be so lightly cast aside.

"Then you are no longer interested in the parentage of that poor young lady, Mr. Maitland?" he asked, after a pause.

"I don't consider now that I have a right to interfere with her private affairs," Jack returned bitterly. "She has someone else to unravel the mystery—should she wish it!"

The detective rose slowly to his feet. He felt disappointed at the half-hearted interest Sir Trevor Maitland's son and heir took in the whirligig of time! He wanted to say something that would rouse him from his lethargy—something to stir the dormant fire and spirit that had been there on the night of the ball.

"Well, perhaps you are right, Mr. Maitland," he replied drily, "the mystery will be solved in a way that will, I fancy, startle us when it is. The veil of the past will not rest long on the shoulders of Ivy Strange when she stands in the dock to answer to the charge of murder! The police have a knack of getting at the root of these matters, you know!"

While he had been speaking the face of the boy in the chair had undergone a strange medley of expressions, ranging from perplexity, wonder, horror, and finally rage.

He started to his feet, trembling with the force of the new passion within him, upsetting the chair behind him with a noisy clatter.

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"Good Heavens, man!" he gasped, "what do you mean? Have you gone mad, or have I?"

Gilbert Chase shook his head.

"No, we are neither of us mad, Mr. Maitland; in fact you are now more in possession of your faculties than you ever were—you were asleep before, you are awake now—and so am I."

"Then—then——" Jack spoke slowly, choosing his words with painful precision—"you were in earnest when you connected the name of that most pure and innocent of girls with that of a *murderess?*"

"I was," the other replied; "and I understood, Mr. Maitland, that you had heard from your step-mother that Ivy Strange was wanted by the police for complicity in the murder of a tramp who was shot in the spinny, the same night you were—the night of the *bal masqué*."

Jack drew his hand across his eyes, as though to sweep away all lingering doubts of dreaming from his mind. The detective's words did not appear to be spoken in jest; a certain gleam in his eyes indicated that he was in deadly earnest.

"A tramp in the spinny!" he said. "I don't understand. Why should she, a girl, ignorant of the very existence of such crimes, commit one, and why a tramp?"

"Why?" the detective echoed softly. "For no reason, Mr. Maitland, unless that tramp turned out to be an undesirable encumbrance, such as a *father*, for instance!"

"Father! Father!" he muttered. "But I thought——" He stopped suddenly, a memory from those long distant days confronting him with a sinister significance. The face of the girl he had loved so passionately, wide-eyed and terror-stricken, telling him to cease seeking to find out the past.

He had attached no reason to her words then, but that of an over-strained mind! But now he shuddered as he recalled little gestures and half-uttered sentences, that fitted, mosaic-like, into the empty crevices of his mind, filling them with a fearful dread of something he could not understand.

He raised his hand to his brow; it was wet with a chilly dampness, that made him feel suddenly weak and helpless.

"How was she to find out such a relationship?" he said harshly. "She would have mentioned it to me immediately; she knew of my efforts to trace her parents."

"How she knew, Mr. Maitland," Chase replied gravely, "I am not quite sure—yet. But I happened to overhear the man—an ex-convict called Mike Holland—declare himself as her father in the spinny some days before the murder took place. And also, on the night you were shot, I myself met a woman in the wood, heavily cloaked, coming from the direction of the spinny.

"I caught her wrist, but she bit my hand suddenly, and I let go, not without leaving a bruise on her wrist though. Afterwards I recognised that same bruise on the wrist of Ivy Strange!"

Jack was silent; the words that kept dancing in his brain were those that had slipped from the detective so glibly, but to him were writ in letters of flame—"an ex-convict, called Mike Holland!"

Then that mark, that fearful stigma of shame on the brow of the innocent girl he had loved so dearly, had its cruel origin in the broad-arrow that the convict had worn, and whose crime—according to the Scriptures — must be visited upon the helpless, guiltless, third and fourth generations!

Oh, the cruelty! The mocking cruelty of Fate, that should have allowed so fair a flower to spring from such a stagnant root!

He looked at Gilbert Chase, to see whether he connected the mark on the girl's brow, about which he himself had told him, with the murdered convict, but apparently he had forgotten the conversation, for the detective's face was impassive, and his eyes mildly vacant, as he returned his host's gaze.

"Surely you must be making some mistake, Chase?" Jack said eagerly. "Just think—a low tramp, a gaol-bird—to be the father of a girl as beautiful and refined-looking as—as her ladyship herself! It is incredible."

Gilbert Chase raised his eyebrows the slightest shade higher. "Ah—yes—that may be so, Mr. Maitland," he said slowly; "but Ivy Strange was the only person likely to profit by the death of such a disreputable parent as Mike Holland, and in spite of her looking as refined as her ladyship, I'm afraid that would only prove that she had a strong motive for suppressing the ex-convict!"

"Tell me what time the man was murdered?" Jack asked again, after a pause, in which he had been thinking swiftly and connecting loose ideas that had floated away from their moorings during the time he had lain ill.

"About ten minutes after you had been shot," the detective replied, wondering what thoughts were evolving behind the once alert brain of Sir Trevor's son and heir.

"Ten minutes," Jack murmured. "That was the night of the ball, Chase? Ah, I'm beginning to understand now," he cried, his voice quickening with a subdued excitement. "Nurse Beaumont warned me to get well and strong for Ivy's sake, as she was in danger, and needed my help sorely. I did not know then what she meant; but now I do! I can prove that Ivy was in the Manor when I saw you outside and afterwards left you to meet Digby Scarlett."

Gilbert Chase blinked his eyelids—a nervous trick of his when surprised.

"Softly—softly, Mr. Maitland," he murmured; "let me understand. How do you know that the young lady was in the Manor then?"

Jack hesitated, and a sudden flush mantled on his cheek as he remembered how, acting on the spur of the moment, he had carried his fainting sweetheart into his step-mother's dressing-room, where he knew she would be able to rest in peace.

Then outside he had met his father and, afraid lest his anger should be roused against the girl, he had, for the first time in his life, parried his parent's questioning with a prevarication. He wished he had not, now that he saw what it would mean to the girl whose life was in jeopardy.

The slightly cynical smile that was curving the thin lips of the detective deepened the colour in his face, but at the same time decided his answer.

"I hesitated to tell you," he said, with a quiet dignity, "not because I was afraid to, but at first I was uncertain whether it would be wise, since I knew my father objected to the engagement that existed between us, and I desired to spare her. But I will tell you how I know that Ivy Strange was in the Manor when I left it.

"She had fainted, and I took her to my step-mother's dressing-room; then, meeting my father in the corridor, I shielded her from his possible anger by saying I had taken Lady Maitland into her room. I am sorry now," he said simply, "that I made an excuse; but it was with the best of intentions. You believe my word, I hope?"

Gilbert Chase smiled. "In my calling, Mr. Maitland," he said quietly, "we are trained never to accept biassed statements of any description; but I may say that I should like to see Sir Trevor for a moment before I go. Did any of the servants see you with her?" he went on. "It will be as well to prove an *alibi*. They are sure to have noticed that it was not her ladyship."

Jack frowned thoughtfully. "One of the maids saw me carrying her," he said; "I don't remember which one. Besides, Ivy was wearing a blue domino, and was masked, so wouldn't be recognised."

"Ah! And who is Nurse Beaumont?" queried the detective, scribbling in his notebook as he spoke.

"The woman who was engaged to nurse me," Jack replied. "She left rather suddenly the other day. My step-mother told me that she had wished to go. But, hang it all, Chase!" he went on impetuously, "don't cross-examine me like this. Tell me—is—is Ivy Strange found yet?"

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"Not yet; but she will be very soon," replied the other shortly. "We suspect she is in London; all criminals fly there, and have been heard to swear that it is the best hiding-place on earth!"

Jack winced, and a momentary desire seized him to fling the smooth-faced detective out of the room. Then he remembered that the man was only doing his duty, and that he had first sought him out to take up the inquiry into his poor little love's parentage.

A sudden thought seized him, filling him with a new spring of life.

If she were hiding, then she could not possibly be married to his enemy; for he knew Digby Scarlett sufficiently to be sure he would not try to marry a girl under a cloud, even had she the beauty of a Venus!

Yet that letter, purporting to be from Digby Scarlett, which his step-mother had shown him, said deliberately that they were to be married the next day! He dare not mention that letter to the detective lest he should demand to see it, and so obtain Ivy's address through Digby Scarlett. But one question he could not resist, in the hope of knowing the worst—or the best.

"Are you searching for her under her own name or another?" he asked, turning to light his cigarette.

"Her own name," replied the detective drily, "as another would hardly do—since she hasn't one. But her description is in every police-station in the United Kingdom; it is only a matter of time now!"

Jack went up to him quickly, and grasped his arms.

"Chase, look here; found or not, Ivy Strange is as innocent of that murder as I am—or you! Good Heavens! man, that girl could no more handle a weapon than a fly! I tell you that there is some diabolical agency working at the bottom of all this, and I mean to find out what it is! Don't, because you are helping to hound her down," he exclaimed passionately, "refuse to assist me in finding out the real truth about her past; for I will stake my life on her not being the child of the convict, in spite——" He stopped suddenly.

"In spite," the detective finished, "of her being marked by a broad arrow! I understand, Mr. Maitland," he went on; "and have not neglected any of my inquiries regarding Miss Strange; though things look very black just now against her—the fact of her running away, for instance! But now, if I may, Mr. Maitland, I should like the opportunity of a few words with Sir Trevor."

Jack touched the electric button on the wall.

"Lawson, ask Sir Trevor whether Mr. Chase may have a few moments' conversation with him," he said, when the man appeared in answer to his ring.

"You see, Mr. Maitland," said the detective, "if Sir Trevor tells me that he saw you coming out of her ladyship's dressing-room, and her ladyship also owns to having been elsewhere at the time, then, of course, that raises a strong point in Miss Strange's favour."

Jack nodded. He was painfully keen that his father should see Gilbert Chase, and know how imperative it was that his evidence should save the life of the girl he had wished to adopt.

Suddenly Lawson returned—his face white and frightened.

"If you please, Mr. Jack," he said, gazing from one to the other hesitatingly, "the squire is ill in her ladyship's boudoir."

"Ill!" Jack and the detective exclaimed simultaneously.

"Why, he was quite well this afternoon," the boy continued. "What has happened?"

Before the man could make any reply, there was a sound of shuffling feet, and, flinging the door wide open, Jack Maitland and Gilbert Chase saw a sight that froze the words on their tongues.

Lifted on either side by Heriot North and Digby Scarlett came Sir Trevor, grimacing and mumbling to himself, a withered, shapeless mass of humanity, the skeleton of what he had been at lunch; while the faces of the two men who assisted him were also strangely white and livid—a dark red stain being on Digby Scarlett's chin.

Jack's eyes shot over their heads to the woman who followed the tragic trio, with a pale face and set, gleaming eyes, hard and tearless like diamonds.

He went forward quickly, and touched her on the arm.

"Mater! Tell me, in pity's name, what is the matter with—my father?"

The detective, watching keenly this domestic tragedy, saw her large eyes flicker with a strange light, and her mouth twitched as she replied coldly:

"Sir Trevor has had a sudden stroke—or mental collapse—while talking to—to Mr. North and Mr. Scarlett in my boudoir. They are taking him to his room."

Her eyes travelled to his companion, and when they met the steady gaze of the detective standing beside him, she bit her lip with a sudden spasm, then raising her head with a haughty gesture, she followed the procession of death.

"My father! a stroke!" Jack muttered; "then——"

His eyes met those of the detective, who finished the sentence for him—"then he will not be able to prove an *alibi* for you, Mr. Maitland. I am sorry!"

When he was alone, Gilbert Chase strolled across the spinny to the "Rest," and waited outside the gates for the coming of the master.

THIRTY-FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Ray of Light.

As he stood under the shadow of the large tree facing the gates, and smoking a cigarette bestowed upon him by Jack Maitland, Gilbert Chase speculated upon the sudden break-down of the hale and hearty squire of Melton. What could have brought about the collapse in her ladyship's boudoir?

The faces of the two men who had upheld the Squire had worn peculiar expressions, Digby Scarlett's, indeed, having resembled that of a fiend, while Heriot North had been almost as grey as the stricken man.

Even the beautiful woman, at whom he had glanced with new interest, had also seemed deeply stirred by some emotion which she had concealed beneath her frozen exterior—an emotion that appeared apart from the trouble that had fallen upon her.

What, he wondered, had taken place in the boudoir between those four souls—the lips of one, indeed, sealed perhaps for ever.

Suddenly he roused himself. A woman was coming along the path, a dirty-looking creature, whose draggled and scanty attire pointed to a long tramp through all sorts of weather. But it was not her wardrobe that attracted the professional acumen of Gilbert Chase, but her face—the usual low-bred type, that suggested a partially stunted growth of the mental faculties.

He moved forward swiftly as she drew nearer, and waited with a grim smile of satisfaction for her to speak to him, feeling pretty certain that she would do so; and he was right, for, seeing him in the gathering twilight, the woman began her customary plea for alms.

"Please, kind sir, a copper," she wailed; then started back, as the detective grasped her by the arm, and said sternly:

"I thought you would come back in time! Now, answer me a few questions, or I will take you to the 'look-up' for begging!"

The woman's face paled under the layers of dirt that had accumulated on it, and into her shifty eyes there flashed a look of abject terror, as she tried to pull her arm from the strong hand that held her.

"Lemme go!" she cried; "I ain't doin' nothin'—only arstin' fur a copper! An' wot can I tell yer that yer don't knows on, as I s'pose yer one o' them 'splits'!"

Gilbert Chase smiled grimly. He had already learnt something from the woman's phraseology; a term he had been quick to classify as thieves' slang, and only used by those mem

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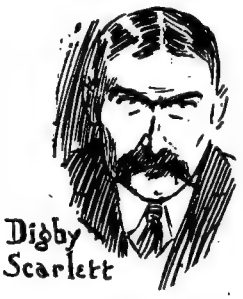

bers of the fraternity who, periodically, became guests of His Majesty! It was the word "splits," by which detectives in criminology were known in the conversations of the submerged tenth!

"This is what I wish to ask you, my good madam," he said sarcastically. "What were you doing in the 'New Age' bar some few weeks ago, and why did you call a certain lady who was there 'Polly'? I've been waiting for you to return. I knew it wouldn't be long, and," he went on sternly, "if you tell me any lies, it will be the worse for you! You may find yourself behind a locked door again!"

It was a chance shot, but it did its work, for the woman's loose, coarse mouth quivered as she replied fearfully:

"Please, sir, I was a-doin' no 'arm; s'elp me if I was! I 'ad come to Melton to find my 'usbin', pore Mike 'Olland!"

Gilbert Chase's hand tightened unconsciously on the woman's arm. This was an unexpected *denouement* that appealed to his sense of the dramatic, and he blessed the sudden impulse that had led him to the gate of the "Rest," and enabled him to kill two birds with one stone.

"Why didn't you come forward at the inquest?" he said sternly.

She hesitated, and shifted uneasily under the detective's eyes.

"Becos I only come out o' quod a week or two ago!" she muttered sullenly. "As soon as I knew, I come 'ere; tramped all the way, too."

He looked at her thoughtfully. In spite of his vast experience with the men and women of her class, he could detect the truth when it was spoken even by such outcasts as the woman before him.

"Then if you came to Melton as soon as you knew of your husband's murder," he said slowly, "why, since you were afraid to visit the police-station and learn about him, did you visit the place at all—unless you wished to see someone who was not dead?"

The woman gazed restlessly round, as though meditating an attempt at an escape. Then seeing the futility of it, she said sullenly:

"I came to see no one! Jest to look abaht! I didn't even know as 'ow Polly were in Melton. W'en I saw 'er I thort as 'ow she 'ad come up to find out abaht Mike too."

"What is Polly's surname?" demanded the detective sharply—"and is she related to you?"

"She's called Polly Martin—down wi' our lot," the woman answered unwillingly; "but 'er real nime is Polly 'Olland; she were Mike's twin-sister."

Gilbert Chase stifled an exclamation, and his pale blue eyes glittered with suppressed excitement. So "Mary Mason" was unrobed of her respectability. He would deal summarily with her when they met again. In the meantime he must not lose sight of this woman.

If he let her go, he knew her slippery nature well enough to guess that she would not come back once she was free. Yet, on the other hand, if he left his post to take her to the station, he might miss a still more important quarry.

As he was speculating on his next move, the heavy tramp of steps came out of the gloom, with the measured tread that has become a policeman's peculiarity.

"Ah, Robert," he said, beckoning the man to him. "I want you to keep this woman at the station until I come. She is the wife of the murdered Mike Holland, and I have some inquiries to make before she goes. There's no charge against her," he added, in answer to the policeman's look of inquiry; "I only wish to satisfy a few doubts."

No sooner had the woman disappeared with her custodian, than another figure approached the gates of the "Rest."

Gilbert Chase drew a long breath of relief.

"I was just in time," he muttered. "I might have missed him in another minute."

The master of the "Rest" was looking pleased, and a smile of triumph on his lips accentuated the hate lying dormant in his dark eyes. But the smile faded as a slim, alert man stepped quickly up to him.

"I've been waiting on the off-chance of seeing you, sir," he said pleasantly.

Digby Scarlett looked at him scowlingly, and a black cloud crossed his face as he recognised his interlocutor.

"I'm afraid I'm engaged this evening," he said brusquely. "You had better call again, my man."

The detective's face flushed, and his mouth grew set, as he replied suavely:

"I also shall be engaged later, Mr. Scarlett. And if it is at all convenient to you, I think, if I may suggest it, that it would be advisable were you to see me now. I fancy what I have to say may interest you."

Digby Scarlett looked at him sharply, but could infer nothing from the smooth face and soft voice of the detective. He shrugged his shoulders carelessly with an assumption of amused good humour.

"Very well, Chase, since you will see me, I suppose I must submit with a good grace! The reason I did not wish to be disturbed to-night was because I have not yet recovered from the dreadful shock of seeing poor Sir Trevor Maitland struck down so suddenly."

He led the way into the library, and switched on the electric light, then turned to his companion with a gesture towards the spirit carafe on the side-table.

The detective shook his head. "No, thank you, sir. I never drink between meals," a speech not strictly true, but Gilbert Chase had work before him that required a clear head.

"Well," said Scarlett, flinging himself into a deep, leather-chair, "what is this news, Chase, that you prophesied would interest me?"

The detective fixed his expressionless, blue eyes upon the saturnine face of the man in the chair. He wondered how his next speech would affect his self-possession.

"I particularly wished to see you, sir," he began slowly, "because, firstly, I happen to be in possession of something belonging to you—a telegram."

Digby Scarlett looked at him with a startled glance, and the artificial smile with which he had listened to his visitor's opening words gave way under the momentary stiffening of the muscles round his mouth.

"How's that?" he queried, after a pause. "I do not remember expecting a telegram; and even if I did, I fail to understand how it could have fallen into your hands. 'Chase' and 'Scarlett' are not names easily confused, are they?"

"No," rejoined Gilbert Chase genially. "It happened like this. I was leaving St. Pancras by the same train as yourself, the other day, and though you did not see me, I noticed you some time before the train left. Then a telegraph boy ran up to me with a telegram, and as I expected one from a colleague, I never thought of asking the boy to repeat the name, which I did not catch in the bustle of starting; and so it was not till afterwards that I saw I had made a mistake and read something certainly not intended for my eyes," and he laughed softly.

Digby Scarlett put out his hand peremptorily. It was trembling, and the sharp eyes of Gilbert Chase noticed that his upper lip was quivering, in spite of the sheltering moustache.

"Give it to me then, since you say it was mine," Scarlett said curtly.

After a moment's search through all his pockets with minute care, under the increasing impatience of his host, the detective shook his head.

"There, now," he said, in a vexed tone, "after taking

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great care of it, I have left it at the 'New Age' with my things. But," he added hastily, "I can remember every word, Mr. Scarlett. It was not an ordinary message. It was dated from Rotherhithe, and ran like this:

"*Plant successful. 'V' accidentally drowned; send money.*—LAMPITT."

A red gleam flickered in Digby Scarlett's eyes, and he fell back in his chair with a hoarse laugh.

"No wonder you were astonished at such a telegram, Chase. 'V' is the name of a mad dog I wanted disposed of—it stands for Vixen, and great caution had to be used before she could be brought near the river."

"I quite believe it," said the detective gravely; but whether in irony or not, Digby Scarlett could not decide.

He rose from the chair, and taking a cigar from his case, said:

"Then you will leave that telegram here when you are passing, Chase? I will say 'good night' now; I am dog-tired."

"Not so tired as the *dog* that was—drowned, sir," replied the detective simply, playing with the brim of his hat, with an absent look in his eyes.

Digby Scarlett bit his lip. "I am tired enough to wish for no other society to-night than my own," he retorted grimly. "So, good evening to you, Mr. Chase."

"One moment, sir," interrupted the other suavely, as his host touched the bell.

"Well"—impatiently—"what is it now?"

"Only that I had a long chat with Mrs. Phillpott when in London," began Gilbert Chase quietly, "and took away with me the photograph of a lady whom I believe is your sister—so Mrs. Phillpott told me. I did not know that the wife of the man you prosecuted eighteen years ago was your sister, Mr. Scarlett!"

Digby Scarlett raised his eyes, and after a long, swift scrutiny, dropped them under the steady gaze of the mild blue ones of the man who was concealing more than he revealed.

"Well," he said harshly, "what of it? And why should I not inquire about a woman without your interference, Mr. Chase? *I* am not 'wanted' by the police, you know."

"I am sure, sir, you are not to blame for *that*," murmured the man from Scotland Yard respectfully. Then he added, "The picture of Mrs. Grant is very lovely. She reminded me strongly of another face which both you and I have seen recently. You will know whom I mean, Mr. Scarlett—names are not necessary."

Digby Scarlett turned savagely upon him. "You really leave a great deal to my imagination, Mr. Chase! I have no idea as to the lady you mean. You police-court chaps have a way of wrapping a mystery round a lamp-post!"

Gilbert Chase smiled at him thoughtfully. "Perhaps so, sir, I am afraid we are very dense—sometimes; then we chance upon a ray of light, and follow it up—and follow it up," he repeated softly.

At the door he paused and said suddenly: "Can you remember what conversation you and Mr. North were having with her ladyship when Sir Trevor overheard you, sir?"

The master of the "Rest" grew ashen under the tan of his skin, and his lips parted in a cruel sneer.

"No, I can't!" he retorted roughly. "You had better curb your impatience till Sir Trevor recovers—if he ever does!"

"If he ever does," the detective repeated; then added: "I will call on Mr. North to-morrow—his memory may be better than yours."

When he was alone, Digby Scarlett flung himself in a chair, and laughed long and loudly.

"You are very clever, Mr. Chase; but you will not gain much by hanging round me! Confound that telegram!" he muttered—the laugh dying on his lips; "it might have been

(*Continued overleaf.*)

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THE BOND BETWEEN.

awkward! But he must not see that fool North to-morrow; the hysterical 'man of honour' will bleat everything out, then there will be an end to my little plans. No; I must prevent him from killing the goose that lays my golden eggs! Once the police tumble to my plot it will be U.P. with me!"

He rose, and dug the poker so savagely into the fire that a piece of wood fell out upon the fur rug, and a tiny blaze sprang up. He ground it with his heel, then smiled evilly.

"My question is answered; I no longer am in doubt as to the method of silencing Mr. Heriot North—and at the same time wiping out my debt with him!"

When the night grew darker, a figure heavily cloaked and with a soft slouch hat on, slipped out of the hall door of the "Rest," and vanished into the gloom.

THIRTY-SIXTH CHAPTER.
The Flame in the Sky.

When Gilbert Chase left the "Rest," he walked quickly towards the village, in the direction of the police-station. He was satisfied with his interview with the master of the "Rest," and chuckled grimly once or twice. "I don't fancy we got much change out of each other; but at the same time, I made Mr. Digby Scarlett feel very uncomfortable! He was a bit of a juggins to think that I would be such a simpleton as to have given him that telegram! No; it is safely locked up with my other little documents."

Arriving at the police-station, he was told that the woman claiming to be the wife of the murdered man, Mike Holland had been detained in one of the cells on suspicion of having stolen half-a-sovereign that dropped on the floor from her pocket. The inspector on duty had waited for the dectetive to question her, as he was last with her.

When the woman was brought into the charge-room she piteously cried out at the sight of Gilbert Chase.

"Don't let 'em lock me up, mister! I swear I didn't steal it! If I was to drop dead this very instant, I'm as innercent as a babe unborn!"

"Oh, we know all about that 'babe,'" said the inspector humorously; "you're all babes till you're convicted. Come, now; tell us how a woman in your poor condition came to have half-a-sovereign in your pocket?"

"It was give me by a young lidy in the Park in London, sir;" wailed the woman; "I told 'er I was walkin' to Melton to see my 'usbin's grave, an' she took such a interest in it that she gave it to me, sayin' as I was to keep it in memory of my little gal as was lost years ago. She was a lovely young lidy, sir," the woman panted; "tall an' with fair 'air and large sad eyes—like a pictur'!"

Gilbert Chase started, and whispered something to the inspector who showed him the half-sovereign. It was a Jubilee one; and the professional instinct of the detective was aroused as he remembered that the missing girl, Ivy Strange, had gone away with a present from Sir Trevor of ten Jubilee half-sovereigns.

The inspector looked at her doubtfully, then said slowly: "Well, as there's no one to charge you with theft I must let you go—though I don't credit you with telling the truth—you are discharged!"

Gilbert Chase put his hand on the woman's arm. "Tell me; was the lady who gave you that money anything like this picture, or that?"

He pointed to the placards that are pasted on the walls of police-stations, with photos of the people "wanted," then showed her a picture he had taken from his pocket.

The woman gazed round the walls until she saw the likeness he pointed out, then gazed at the piece of cardboard in his hand. As she did so, she uttered a hoarse cry.

"The lidy!—the lidy!" she whispered under her breath.

"Well," said the detective, "do you recognise this lady?"

The woman raised her head. All the cunning of her kind had returned to her, and she guessed instinctively that the lady whose face she was asked to recognise was in some trouble, and she was not the one to "round on a pal."

"No," she said boldly. "I never seed 'er afore. The lidy who give me the 'arf quid was red-haired, and 'er 'usbin' give 'er the money for me."

Gilbert Chase glanced at her sharply. Her dense face revealed nothing, and she looked at him with an expression of fatuous innocence.

"Where are you living?" he said abruptly.

"Fourteen Dorset Street, Whitechapel," she replied glibly. "If yer wants me, I'll be glad to come, mister."

He let her go reluctantly. After all, she was not of much use, now that he knew her relation to Mary Mason; and she would probably hang about the village for a day or two.

Once free of the police-station, the woman glanced back with a grin.

"Thort yer was goin' to make me split on *'er*, did yer?" she muttered. "Not much; I may be a wrong 'un, but I ain't a-goin' to round on *'er!* Now, I'll try to find Polly, she must be in service abaht 'ere!"

* * * * *

That night, when the village of Melton was wrapped in slumber and the inhabitants dreamt of a land where all was sunny and warm, a tiny tongue of fire curled above the roof of a house not far from the Manor. The tongue grew into a flame, and the flame into a vivid sheet of crimson fire that lit the sky with a brilliant radiance far and wide; and in that house lay Heriot North, the man who held a secret.

(To be concluded shortly.)

Little Sister: "Most of the articles in your paper this month is awful poor." Little brother (editor of an amateur monthly): "I know it, but the boys that wrote 'em sent stamps for their return, an' I wanted the stamps."

"My wife has been studying geology, and the house is so full of rocks I can't find a place to sit down." "What will you do about it?" "I've induced her to take up astronomy." "Is that any better?" "Of course; she can't collect specimens."

A dog was advertised to play on a piano in a circus. When the time came for the dog to perform, he got on a seat and began playing. Suddenly someone in the crowd shouted "Rats!" Upon which the dog bounded off the seat. The piano kept on playing.

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All these things and many other interesting facts are set forth at great length and with considerable lucidity of style by Mr. F. Cecil Russell (originator of the treatment which bears his name), in a little book called "Corpulency and the Cure" (256 pages), now in its nineteenth edition. Mr. Russell explains pretty well everything that has been written on the subject of the causes and the cure of corpulency, and goes deeply into the various so-called "cures" which have been from time to time foisted upon the world, only to expire after a short life.

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A Way of Getting Even.

Medicus: "I wish I knew how to get even with that undertaker." She: "Why not retire from practice?"

Not the Only One.

He: "Remember that you have promised solemnly to be a sister to me." She: "Yes, but you mustn't behave as though you were the only relative of that kind I have in the world."

Cows-Milk; Calves-Jelly.

Nellie: "Oh! do look at those pretty little cows." Maud: "They are not cows, they are calves." Nellie: "But what is the difference?" Maud: "Why, cows give milk, and calves give jelly."

Breaking It Gently.

Quarryman: "Shure, an' it's sad news I've got to tell ye, Missis Murphy; your husband has broken his new watch." Mrs. Murphy: "How did he do it?" Quarryman: "A ten-ton rock fell on him."

Money Made by Pen.

Wealthy Stranger: "Yes; and I made my money, every farthing of it, by my pen." Tompkins: "Ah! a novelist, or a dramatist, maybe?" Wealthy Stranger: "Not me. I used to keep a sheep farm in New Zealand."

Definition of Genteel.

A servant who prided herself on being employed in a "genteel family" was asked what she meant by a "genteel family." "Where they have two or three kinds of wine, and the gentleman uses bad language," was the reply.

No Sympathy Given.

He (after pulling against tide for a couple of hours under a broiling sun): "Don't you think it would be rather a good idea to pull up for a while under the shade of one of those jolly old trees?" She: "And break the spell of this delicious motion? Not for worlds."

Misunderstood.

Ugly Customer: "What price did you say this cape was?" Pretty Milliner: "Seven guineas, madam." Ugly Customer (after a pause): "Don't you think that rather a dreadful figure?" Pretty Milliner: "Well, madam, since you say so, it is not the best I have seen—but I think you will find the cape will hide it."

All But.

"Dear Mabel, do you love me?" "O-h, George!" "Don't you, Mabel? Just a little tiny bit?" "W-e-ll, y-e-s, George." "And if I married you, would your father furnish us a house?" "Yes, George." "And take me into partnership?" "Yes, George." "And would your mother keep away from us, except when I invited her?" "She would, George." "And your brothers and sisters, too?" "Why, certainly, George." "And of course the old gentleman would settle my debts?" "Of course, George." "Darling, will you marry me?" "No, George."

Broken, but Mended.

He: "So the engagement is at an end?" She: "Yes." He: "Who broke it?" She: "The minister who married us."

One was Enough.

He (in an argument): "Well, thank goodness, I'm not two-faced." She: "You ought to be thankful. One face like yours is enough."

Doesn't Always Follow.

She: "Do you believe the howling of a dog is always followed by a death?" He: "No; not always; sometimes the man who shoots at the dog is a poor marksman."

The Roots are Deep.

Nelly: "I don't see how getting one's feet wet causes toothache." Jack: "You don't? If you had ever had a tooth pulled you would know that the roots run down to your toes."

To Show His Bravery.

Mrs. Frailty: "Before we were married you often wished there was some brave deed you could do to show your love." Mr. Frailty: "Yes, dear, and I would do it now." Mrs. Frailty: "Then, love, go down into the kitchen and discharge Bridget."

At a Travelling Show.

Irate Visitor: "I call this a downright fraud! You advertise on your bills 'The Most Remarkable Dwarf in the World,' and he turns out to be five feet five inches high!" Bland Showman: "Exactly so, sir. That's just what's so remarkable about him. He's the tallest dwarf on record!"

Prompted by Kindness.

Lady of the House: "I should think a big, strong fellow like you would rather work than go round begging." Sloppy Sim: "I would if it wasn't for one thing." Lady: "What's that?" Sloppy Sim: "I ain't got no fambly meself, and I'm afraid if I went to work I might crowd out some poor chap who has little ones to support."

Near Freezing Point.

"Perhaps it is best after all," remarked the rejected suitor as he lingered in the hall. "A man of twenty-five would soon tire of a wife who hovered round the thirty-two mark." "Why, Mr. Ardent," said the woman in the case, "how very ungallant of you to insinuate that I am thirty-two." "Well, perhaps you are not," he replied, "but it certainly struck me that you were somewhere near the freezing point."

His Narrow Escape.

Emma: "No, George, it cannot be. We must part." (Bitterly.) "My purse-proud father will not accept a poor man for his son-in-law." George (frantically): "Say not so. I cannot give thee up. My heart will break. I——" Purse-proud father enters the room without observing them. Throws himself into a chair and groans aloud: "Bankruptcy! Ruin! Every penny swept away!" George (sweeping himself away at these words): "Farewell, then, Emma, since you discard me." But he says to himself, "Wonderfully narrow escape that."

A New Way of Doing it.

"Alberta," began the young man, somewhat huskily, "are your folks all well?" "Quite well, Mr. Watkins, thank you." "I have come this evening, Alberta," he resumed, heroically, "to—to—bring back this volume of Dante you lent me last evening——" "Why, you haven't finished it already, Mr. Watkins?" "And to say that I—that I—like—that I like Dante first rate." "Dante is so soulful," said Alberta softly. "He's immense," assented Watkins, heartily; "and speaking of Dante, I—er——" "Yes." "There isn't a poet of modern times, in my opinion, that comes up to Dante." "Except Tennyson." "And, speaking of Tennyson, Alberta—I—er—" "Yes." "Will you let me make you a present one day of a volume of Tennyson, with the inscription on the fly-leaf, 'To my——'" "Well?" "'To my wife, Alberta?'"

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

A Matrimonial Difficulty.

"MATER" is worried about the marriage of her daughter. The latter is a very pretty girl, and has recently become engaged. "MATER," however, is a widow, and her husband has only recently died. Since that event they have had no fixed abode, but have lived mostly at seaside boarding-houses. "MATER" wishes her daughter's wedding to be a good one, and one which will show her off favourably before her husband's relations. How can she best arrange about the place of ceremony?

* * * * *

It is quite often, "MATER," that houses are lent for the purposes of wedding festivities. As you have no fixed abode, I presume it is not very important at which church or chapel the ceremony takes place. Why not, then, persuade some relation or friend of yours—and you must have some—to allow the entertaining to take place at their house, and the marriage at their place of worship?

* * * * *

If this is not possible, perhaps you can take rooms for a week at which you could entertain your guests, or, failing that, why not arrange your spread at a hotel? I quite see that you wish your daughter to appear favourably before her husband's friends, and you should try to arrange something of the kind I suggest.

The Sweetheart as Critic.

"GEORGE" is an actor, and engaged to a girl. For a long time she has been true to him; and has spoken very highly of his acting—a thing "GEORGE" is very sensitive about. The other day, however, somebody told "GEORGE" that he had heard that his girl often spoke very disparagingly about the way he played parts, and in the presence of people likely to be useful to him. Do I think he has a right to be offended with her, and to break off the match?

* * * * *

It certainly is a little hard to hear that one's own sweetheart has spoken unkindly about one's abilities. Criticism is all right, but it depends on the critic. If your sweetheart does not really think you act well, it was very wrong of her to speak to you in flattering terms about it. In any case, a loyal sweetheart ought to try to further her lover's interests behind his back by saying nice things about him.

* * * * *

To do otherwise is unkind. Whatever she may have said about your acting, however, should not alter your determination to do your best, and if other people really think you act well, I should not be discouraged by her opinions. If you can get any distinct case of her having spoken unkindly about you, bring it to her notice, and get her explanation. Don't go by hearsay.

Is She Flirting?

"FRED" is worried about his sweetheart. She is, he believes, very true to him, but often talks to other men, and in a very intimate way. He does not want to appear too jealous, but do I not think it wrong of her to act as she is doing?

* * * * *

If she assures you of her love for you, you ought to trust her. The other men may be old friends, whom she cannot drop just because she is engaged to you. You cannot expect her to give up all other society.

The Time for Second Marriage.

"I AM a widow, and my husband has been dead ten months," writes "TRIXY." "I am desperately in love with a widower, who is very kind and has offered to marry me. I should be very happy with him, but my friends object to my marrying again so soon. Do you think it is advisable to accept his offer?"

* * * * *

If you are so very much in love with him, you would be foolish to refuse his offer out of a consideration for your late husband's memory, which evidently you do not feel. Marry the widower, if you love him, but it would be in better taste to postpone the ceremony for a year, if he is willing to do so.

The Absent Friend's Girl.

"A FRIEND of mine," writes "IN DOUBT," "is a sailor, and has gone away for three years. A few weeks before he went he became attached to a girl. Since he has gone, she has stopped me in the street, and spoken to me very often. Is it right for me, a single young man, to stop and talk to her or pass her by? I like her very well, and wish she were mine She writes to her sweetheart every other week."

* * * * *

There is no harm in your speaking to her at all, but beware of making your meetings too frequent. You say you wish she were yours. Well, depend on it if you see too much of her, that feeling will increase, and you will be stealing your friend's sweetheart, which would be a cruel thing to do. The poor fellow would be thinking all the time she was true to him, only to realise that he had been betrayed by his friend. No, I should have as little as possible to do with the absent man's sweetheart, and the sooner you cease meetings with her the better.

Reading to Children.

"E. M. P." is in charge of several young children, and is expected to read stories to them. She herself dislikes children's stories as they are namby-pamby and old-fashioned. Can I recommend her a style of book which is an improvement on those she has in mind?

* * * * *

The books "E. M. P." has mentioned to me in her list are certainly old-fashioned, and as I look back to reading them as a child, they do seem to be a little "namby-pamby." But "E. M. P." should remember that children do not think that at the time. They love in their little hearts to find the good child getting the best of things, and the bad one the worst, which is generally the case in old-fashioned children's stories.

* * * * *

"E. M. P." should keep her reading to such stories, as a great deal depends on the way a young child is taught to look at good and evil from the very first. Whether they are boys or girls they will find out sooner or later what a bold, bad world it is, but it is better it should be later.

Cynthia

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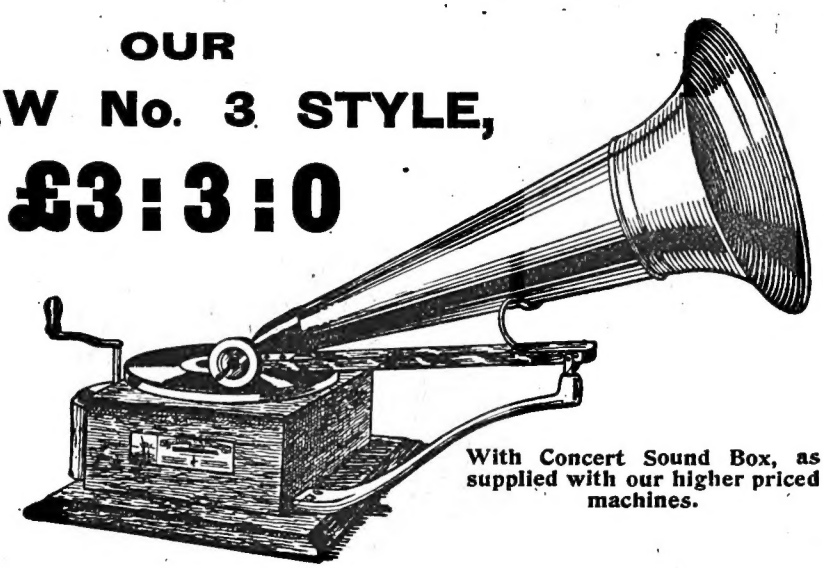

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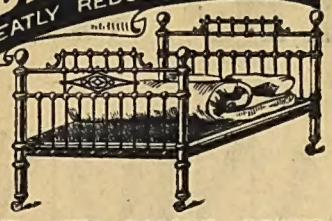

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